

Concussion Recognition & Management

TEXT

Module 1 *Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act*

Page 1 *The History*

The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act is not just a guideline — it's the law. As a responsible licensed health care professional, it's important for you to be familiar with the requirements of this law.

Why the Act was Needed

Video

LILY SUGHROUE, Living with Concussion After Effects:

I have had a series of concussions that went undiagnosed for several years. I saw many medical professionals that didn't know what was going on with me. And this was all happening before the act was passed to recognize concussion and the concussion awareness.

The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act was created to provide a consistent means to identify and manage concussions and to ensure the safety of those involved in youth sports. Governor David Heineman approved the act on April 14, 2011, and it became effective July 1, 2012. As of 2014, all fifty states have some form of concussion awareness legislation in effect.

To see Nebraska's law in its entirety, visit these sites:

Nebraska Revised Statutes, Sections 71-901 to 71-906

<http://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/statutes.php?statute=71-9101>

History of Adoption

http://nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/view_bill.php?DocumentID=11869

History of the Act

Video Excerpt from NET Television's *Concussions: Heading for Change*

NARRATOR: Senator Lathrop introduced the Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act. Brady Beran and Blake Lawrence helped legislators to push the bill into law. Nebraska became the 13th state to pass such a bill. Now, every state has a similar law for youth athletes.

SENATOR LATHROP: It has two components. The first is to identify the student athlete that's suffered a concussion and then take them out of the game. Then, we have a process for having them evaluated, getting them cleared to return to action, and when they can, then they can go back to play sports. So, that's the first and maybe the primary piece. The second would be education.

LORI TERRYBERRY-SPOHR: The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act specified that education must be provided on an annual basis to parents and coaches within the school systems and within other youth sports organizations.

BRADY BERAN: It was important to me because I didn't want any more families or student athletes to, you know, have to go through what my family and I went through. The difficulties and just everything, you know. Emotions, financial, just the different changes it, you know, I'm very happy that it did get passed.

Page 2 *The Purpose*

In what circumstances does the Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act apply?

- Students playing sports at an approved or accredited public school. (Sec. 4)
- Students playing sports at an approved or accredited denominational or parochial school. (Sec. 4)

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- Athletes 19 or younger participating in organized sports through “any city, village, business or nonprofit that organizes sports, charges a fee, or is sponsored by a business.” (Sec. 5)

NOTES:

- The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act does **not** apply to athletic activities at colleges or universities.
- Clinically, the information in this course applies to all suspected concussions, but the law concentrates on sports-related concussions.

The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act establishes the **minimum** for what should be done when a young athlete suffers a concussion. Care can – and should – go beyond this legal minimum. Though the Concussion Awareness Act affects parents, coaches, and adults working with children in pay-for-play activities, these adults may lack your level of knowledge and awareness. Typically they will look to a licensed health care professional as the expert. It’s vital to educate yourself so you’re ready to educate all involved in order to protect our youth.

The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act features **FOUR PRINCIPAL COMPONENTS** of model concussion awareness legislation:

- Education.
- Removal from Play.
- Clearance to Return to Play.
- Return to Learn.

Page 3 *Education*

Education is integral to the law. The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act requires that responsible entities provide brain injury information to coaches and parents as well as to young athletes themselves.

- **Coaches:** Training approved by the State of Nebraska Chief Medical Officer must be made available to all coaches.
- **Parents, Students-Athletes, Athletes/Participants:** Prior to the start of practice or competition, information must be provided on an annual basis.

Ideally, the law calls for education, but the reality is that not everyone will follow the law or retain information even if it is provided. When an injury takes place well into the season, parents or guardians may not remember what they read about concussion weeks or months before.

Educating yourself on best practices will benefit all involved. As you work with coaches, parents, and athletes, you can help in their education process. As a licensed health care professional, you may be the expert to whom they turn in the heat of the moment, when emotions threaten to overwhelm knowledge.

View an approved source of **concussions information**,
maintained by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
for Nebraska coaches and parents.

<http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/concussion/Pages/Home.aspx>

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Page 4 *Removal from Play*

Removal from Play is taking a young athlete out of the game when a concussion is suspected until evaluated by a licensed health care professional. It also means keeping the young person out of risky activities during treatment and recovery, not just the activity he or she was taking part in when the injury took place.

Unlike many colleges and universities, schools and club sports programs may lack protocols and armies of athletic trainers and medical professionals to help determine when a youth needs to be removed from play. It may fall to you, as a licensed health care professional, to help prevent young athletes from going back in after sustaining a concussion. Young people in your care will need your assistance to help manage their concussion symptoms.

Removal from Play and Return to Play

Video

ARTHUR MAERLENDER, PhD, ABPP, Center for Brain, Biology, & Behavior Associate Director:
We need multiple views. And different people have different areas of expertise that they bring to this problem of the concussion. Being a member of that team is part of what makes it function. It's just not one person out there on their own making decisions. We have a group of people who come to a consensus, but the licensed health care professional is the person who actually has to sign off on a letter and makes the final decision about return to play. So, as a member of the team, they play a critical role.

Why Licensed Health Care Professionals Need to Make the Call

Video Excerpt from NET Television's *Concussions: Heading for Change*

BLAKE LAWRENCE:

I didn't know what it'd be about, because still at this point after three concussions in a year, I didn't think it was a big deal. People get concussions; you continue to play. So when I walked into Coach Bo's office after my third concussion, he told me that if I was his son, he would never let me play football again. And I didn't know what to say to that. But that's the moment when I realized how serious concussions are.

Removal from Play is an important component of the Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act that involves removal, notification, and resumption.

- **Removal:** Any student-athlete or athlete is to be removed from play when he or she is reasonably suspected of having a concussion. In a school setting, the individual calling for removal must be professionally affiliated with or contracted by the school.
- **Notification:** The athlete's parents or guardians must be notified of the date and approximate time of the injury and the symptoms and signs that were observed, as well as any actions taken to treat the injury.
- **Resumption:** The student-athlete or athlete must not be allowed to Return to Play until he or she is cleared by a licensed health care professional.

In a 2015 survey of athletic directors conducted by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services:

- **82%** reported that coaches or athletic trainers always remove an athlete with a suspected concussion from play.
- Of that 82%:
 - **96%** reported that an athlete's parents or guardians are always notified after a suspected concussion.
 - **97%** reported that their school requires an athlete with a suspected concussion to be cleared by a health care professional before returning to play.

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- These survey results imply that **18%** of Nebraska coaches or athletic trainers may have chosen *not* to remove from play an athlete with a suspected concussion.

Page 5 *Clearance to Return to Play*

After a concussion, it's up to the injured athletes and their parents or guardians to follow the proper steps to obtain the document needed for clearance to Return to Play. With your help, athletes and their families can receive proper evaluation and management as well as the documentation they need to present to the school administration or club management.

Who can provide clearance to Return to Play?

A licensed health care professional, including:

- A physician or licensed practitioner under the direct supervision of a physician, a certified athletic trainer, or a neuropsychologist.

OR

- A qualified individual who is:
 - Registered, licensed, or otherwise statutorily recognized by the state of Nebraska to provide health care services.

AND

- Is trained in the evaluation and management of **traumatic brain injuries** among a pediatric population.

Note:

An Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) can treat an injured athlete, but it is **not** within an EMT's scope of practice to provide clearance for an injured athlete to Return to Play.

To get clearance to Return to Play, the student-athlete or athlete must:

1. Undergo evaluation by a licensed health care professional (as described above).
2. Receive written clearance from the licensed health care professional.
3. Submit to the school administration or club management:
 - Written and signed clearance to resume participation in athletic activities from the licensed health care professional, and
 - Written permission to resume participation from the student's parent or guardian.

When a young person has sustained a concussion, it's essential to actually see and evaluate the patient before signing off on clearance to Return to Play. You can't simply say, "You're good to go back in ten days."

The child's Return to Play must be gradual, individually structured, and carefully monitored. You can also help the athlete understand what documentation he or she will need to submit to resume play.

View an example of a **Return to Play Clearance Form**.

<https://www.nchsaa.org/sites/default/files/attachments/gfeller-waller-concussion-clearance.pdf>

Page 6 *Return to Learn*

The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act was amended in 2014 to include help for the student returning to school after a concussion. Effective July 2014, this new component established the requirement for

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Return to Learn protocol for the student who has sustained a concussion.

As a licensed health care professional, you can help parents and school staff better understand how to help the injured athlete return to the learning environment.

The Nebraska Concussion Awareness Act Return to Learn protocol recognizes that a student who has sustained a concussion and returned to school may need special attention and assistance until the student is fully recovered.

Recovery will take place in stages. The student will need extensive rest in the early stages, followed by gradually increased mental activity.

Recovery will be an individual process. As a licensed health care professional, your observations and guidance will help the student, parents, and staff travel the road to recovery together.

Individual Treatment Requirements Vary

Video

ARTHUR MAERLENDER, PhD, ABPP, Center for Brain, Biology, & Behavior Associate Director:
Individual treatments vary because brain injuries vary. And they have lot of different presentations.

LILY SUGHROUE, Living with Concussion After Effects:

Before my concussions, I was a gifted student and I absolutely loved school. Just after the first one that I've had, I immediately knew that something was wrong, and I struggled very much in all of my classes, especially math class. I returned to one class after being out of school for a week with my first concussion, and I had no idea what was going on.

ARTHUR MAERLENDER:

In general, we think that reducing the level of activity is really important. We know for a fact that going back too soon and a getting a second injury is probably the worst possible thing that can happen. So, we talk about rest, but what we really mean is that we want to reduce activity and then re-introduce activity in a way that doesn't make symptoms worse. Too much rest doesn't seem to be a good thing either. So, it's a gradual reintroduction of activities from watching TV to being physical in a way that doesn't exacerbate the symptoms that the individual has.

LILY SUGHROUE:

The kinds of services that I received after my diagnosis of traumatic brain injury was I did a lot of speech therapy, occupational therapy, vision therapy, physical therapy. And I worked a lot with Nova Adams at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital. She helped me get an individualized education plan and received special education services in high school.

Mention of any specific health care facility or organization in the videos reflects an individual's specific experience and is not intended as an endorsement from this site.