States Respond to Concerns about Concussions in Youth Sports

DENVER – As of January, all 50 states are addressing concerns about concussions in youth sports through legislation that emphasizes education for coaches, mandates removal of players suspected of head injuries and requires a health professional’s approval for return to play.

The Education Commission of the States today released a report summarizing states’ legislation. Much of it is modeled after a 2009 Washington law named for Zackery Lystedt, a young athlete permanently disabled after sustaining multiple head injuries in a football game and returning prematurely to play.

Among some of the highlights of the report:

National overview

- With Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant’s signature on Jan. 20, 2014, all states have youth sports concussion laws.
- About half the state laws require coaches to complete a concussion management training program, while 80 percent require coaches get information on recognizing concussions.
- Thirteen states extend concussion law requirements to private entities, such as private schools or youth athletic leagues, in addition to public schools.
- Twelve states offer immunity from civil liability to school districts and employees, officials, volunteers or medical personnel; six don’t create or modify liability.

State examples

- California extended concussion provisions to students in charter and private schools.
- Connecticut requires annual concussion training for coaches of intramural and interscholastic athletics.
- Hawaii puts a school’s certified athletic trainer in charge of monitoring a student’s return to physical activity.
- North Dakota extends the duty to remove an athlete from play to each official, a student’s coach, or any other person designated by the district or nonpublic school as having responsibility for the youth during practice, training or competition.
- Rhode Island encourages districts to have all student athletes get baseline testing before the start of every sports season.
- Texas prohibits districts from using football helmets that are 16 years old or older. Helmets 10 years old or older must be reconditioned at least every two years.

In addition, this report briefly considers the potential of emerging science and technology – in baseline testing, a blood test and an iPad application – in shaping the future of state legislation.

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The Education Commission of the States was created by states, for states, in 1965. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.