

IHSA Position Statement Regarding Guidelines for Return to Activity

In accordance with By-law 2.150, a school shall have on file for each student who participates (including practice) in interscholastic athletics a certificate of physical fitness issued by a licensed physician, physician's assistant or nurse practitioner as set forth in the Illinois State Statutes not more than 365 days preceding any date of participation in any such practice, contest or activity. As this By-law addresses pre-participation certification only, there is not a guideline or By-law in place to address release to interscholastic activity following an injury. With the understanding that schools throughout the state have different needs and services available to them, this document was produced to provide guidelines for an athlete's return to activity following an injury.

In accordance with the Illinois School Code, each school should have a written Emergency Action Plan in place to address all athletic injuries, regardless of severity, occurring during a practice or competition. This plan should identify a Chain of Command (Physician/Athletic Trainer/Nurse/Athletic Director/Coach/etc) and address the unique needs of the individual sport and venue.

It is not practical to identify every situation or injury; however the following guidelines were developed to assist the school/coaching staff in determining if the athlete should be allowed to return to activity without a release following a "minor" injury.

1. No swelling or deformity.
2. No tingling, numbness or burning sensations.
3. No headache, nausea, blurred vision, confusion or disorientation.
4. No fever.
5. Symmetrical (equal to the other side) joint range on motion and strength.
6. Ability to bear weight, without a limp, if injury occurs to the lower body.
7. Ability to complete full functional sporting activities without compensation.

As the majority of high school athletes are minors, if there is a question as to their injury and ability to participate a parent or guardian should be consulted. The individual assessing the athlete's ability to return to activity should document the injury, injury findings and the athlete's ability to return to activity.

Athletes unable to meet the above criteria should be encouraged to seek medical attention prior to their return to interscholastic activity. Athletes that seek medical attention should be required to provide a written medical release indicating their ability to participate as well as restrictions. Without obtaining this medical release, the school may assume legal liability if the athlete is allowed to participate in activities not permitted by their medical provider.