



Concussion Management & Return to Play

Scope

This policy will be enforced for all Row Ontario official team activities and all programs with Row Ontario staff or volunteers as instructors or facilitators. This includes Row Ontario hosted events. The policy applies to all provincial team members, program participants, staff and volunteers of all ages while involved in Row Ontario activities.

Policy

Row Ontario is focused on ensuring the wellbeing and safety of all participants, members, volunteers and staff. We recognize the potential severity of a head injury and the commitment and intent behind research to manage concussions. We are committed to educating those involved with Row Ontario, creating awareness to help prevent injuries and appropriately managing any suspected concussions and diagnosed concussions.

Row Ontario's Concussion Policy is committed to the following actions in regard to concussions:

1. Committed to increasing awareness regarding what concussions are and the potential for serious complications.
2. Enforcing procedures and training that promotes preventative actions to help reduce the number of concussions.
3. Providing procedures that support Row Ontario staff, volunteers, umpires and athletes in ensuring quick recognition and removal of any individual with a suspected concussion from Row Ontario activities.
4. Ensure that following a suspected concussion there are clear steps for both the individual and Row Ontario to follow before a return to sport occurs to ensure the focus is on the individual's long-term health.

Note this policy, and associated procedures, complements Row Ontario's comprehensive emergency procedures. Due to the potential seriousness of concussions and the need for increased awareness and training around concussions, Row Ontario created this additional document specific for concussion management and the associated return to sport procedures.

Board approved last: April 20th, 2022

Operational Procedures

Concussion Education and Prevention

Row Ontario will conduct annual training for all Row Ontario staff and volunteers who lead programs or coach teams. This educational session will include up to date information on what concussions are, how to recognize potential concussions and best practices on concussion prevention in rowing. Training will also include the contents of this concussion policy including their roles and responsibilities in recognizing and removing athletes/participants who are involved in a situation that potentially could result in a concussion or have a concussion. Additionally, staff and volunteers will be trained on the educational components for participants and parents, and the related information in the Athlete Code of Conduct.

Regatta officials and umpires will be trained in concussion education as part of their ongoing training. Before each Row Ontario event, officials will be reminded of the concussion policy and procedures.

Concussion education resources will be made available to Row Ontario participants (and their parents/guardians in cases of minors) to help build awareness and understanding of concussions. During practices and programs, coaches and instructors will remind participants of the need to take care around the docks as well as while moving and setting up boats, also ensuring everything is working properly. Ongoing reminders for participants to be aware of potential situations where head injuries could occur will help build awareness and prevention related to concussions.

Row Ontario Provincial Team members who engage in dangerous or reckless behaviour that could potentially create a high risk for a concussion causing situation will be subject to disciplinary actions as described in the Athlete Code of Conduct.

Recognition, Removal and Referral

Please refer to Appendix A – Concussion Recognition Tool

If any individual suffers any kind of injury where there is potential for there to have been direct or indirect force to the head, neck, upper body, or face, and is experiencing or demonstrating any concussion related signs or symptoms, the individual will be removed from activity immediately and rest. The staff or volunteer in charge of the program or practice will err on the side of caution in their decision making. Under Row Ontario's Concussion Policy, all Row Ontario Team Members recognize the authority of their on-site coach.

In competition, coaches, regatta officials, umpires and athletes all have a responsibility to communicate openly and honestly about situations where direct or indirect hits to an individual occur. If a situation occurs where a concussion is possible, the head coach will communicate with the athlete, umpires and regatta officials and parents/guardian as appropriate. The coach in attendance at the competition will make the decision for their athlete if they can continue.

At Row Ontario hosted events, (regattas, camps and courses etc.) the senior staff member on site who is responsible for the event will make the final decision as to a participant's removal from activities. In

the case of a suspected concussion, the individual may not be in a condition to assess themselves or make appropriate decisions.

Row Ontario staff and volunteers recognize that symptoms may not appear immediately and that concussions can occur in many different situations. If an athlete is removed from play following an impact for cautionary reasons, but there are no observable signs or symptoms of a suspected concussion, then the athlete can be returned to play but should be monitored for delayed symptoms for up to 48 hours.

For individuals under 18, all suspected concussions or situations that occurred that potentially could result in a concussion will be reported to the guardian. The guardian should monitor the individual for delayed signs and symptoms for the next 72 hours.

All individuals of any age with a suspected concussion will be referred to a medical doctor (or nurse practitioner) for medical assessment and diagnosis as per the Return to Sport Procedures. Additionally, upon removal each individual, and their parent/guardian if they are under 18, will be given a handout detailing Row Ontario's concussion procedures for removal from sport and return to sport. The Coach will also ensure they are aware of their responsibility to disclose any concussion diagnosis to any other sport organization they are registered with and/or their school.

If a direct force to the head results in immediate injury or "red flag" signs and symptoms of a concussion as found in the Concussion Recognition Tool, Row Ontario's Emergency Procedures in partnership with the facility's location specific Emergency Action Plan will immediately be followed.

(More information on signs and symptoms of a concussion as well as appropriate response needed for various signs can be found in our concussion resources provided to coaches, instructors, parents and athletes and available within the Row Ontario Emergency Procedures as well as the Concussion Recognition Tool in Appendix A of this policy).

Reporting

As per Row Ontario's Emergency Procedures, any incident resulting in injury or removal from activity will be reported on a Row Ontario Incident Report Form. These are to be submitted (electronic images acceptable) to the Row Ontario Chief Executive Officer within 24 hours.

The Chief Executive Officer, or designate, tracks all incident reports for patterns and trends as well as individual situations.

The coach will keep a copy and update the report to document the athlete's progression to return to sport regularly updating the Chief Executive Officer until the incident is closed with the receipt of medical clearance which will be added to the report and securely filed. In documenting the incident and its follow up, Row Ontario's Privacy Policy will be followed.

Participant Disclosure

If an individual discloses, or staff/volunteers become aware through any means, that an individual suffered a possible concussion through other activities they will be unable to participate in Row Ontario activities. Discovery or disclosure of a suspected concussion will be reported on an athlete disclosure form to Row Ontario's Chief Executive Officer within 24 hours, following procedures for incident reporting.

Members of the Row Ontario Team who fail to disclose a possible concussion as described in their Code of Conduct may be subject to discipline as described in the Athlete Code of Conduct.

The individual's return to Row Ontario activities will be treated the same as individuals who incur concussions during Row Ontario activities.

Returning to Rowing

Please refer to Appendix B – Return to Rowing Plan

If removed from rowing due to a suspected concussion the athlete may return once they have confirmed to the coach that they have undergone an assessment by a physician or nurse practitioner and have not been diagnosed as having a concussion.

Athletes who are diagnosed with a concussion should be provided with education about the signs and symptoms of concussion, strategies about how to manage their symptoms, the risks of returning to sport without medical clearance and recommendations regarding a gradual return to school and sport activities. If diagnosed with a concussion, each individual will have their own individualized and medically supervised Return to Sport plan. The plan is a graduated strategy to ensure the long-term health of the individual. Row Ontario is committed to supporting the individual in their recovery and have provided a rowing focused suggested starting Return to Sport Plan. For athletes at any level of education, we work to ensure a Return to Learn strategy be followed before Return to Sport and focus the individual on commencing their educational components first.

Before a participant or athlete is permitted to return to any Row Ontario led practice or program after experiencing signs or symptoms of a concussion, or having reported a concussion, they will need to submit proof of medical clearance that permits them to return to participating in a full range of physical activities. Note that if post-concussion symptoms include dizziness (vertigo) or other balance related symptoms return to the water should be delayed and managed by a medical doctor experienced in concussion treatment.

The written clearance must be provided by a medical doctor or nurse practitioner and submitted to the coach or instructor who will forward to the Chief Executive Officer. The clearance will be filed with Row Ontario's original copy of the incident report or athlete disclosure.

Due to the unpredictability of water conditions, individuals can rejoin activities on the water once they have medical clearance to return to normal training activities (Step 5 of the Standard Return to Rowing Strategy as found in Appendix B).

Athletes who have been provided with a Medical Clearance Letter may progress through steps 5 and 6 of the Sport-specific Return-to-Sport Strategy to gradually return to full, unrestricted sport activities. If the athlete experiences any new concussion-like symptoms during these steps, they should be instructed to stop the activity and return to step 3 to establish the full resolution of symptoms. Medical clearance is required again before progressing to step 4. This information should be provided to the appropriate people (e.g., coach, trainer, teacher).

Once cleared, coaches and instructors will gradually build the activity level to help progress the individual slowly. This will include ensuring the first time on the water is in mild weather conditions and starting with crew boats or boats with stabilising pontoons. The progression for on the water training for different types of rowers is laid out in the return to rowing plan.

Competition (Step 6) will only be permitted once they have demonstrated symptom free completion of a minimum of two on the water training experiences involving a mix of conditions. (The time required to complete this may depend on the weather conditions occurring in the location. The coach/instructor will work with the individual focusing on an individualized progression with the individual's long-term health as the priority.)

Review date: Sept 9th 2024

Operational procedures are not approved by the Board of Directors. Operational procedures are approved by the Chief Executive Officer.

Appendix A – Signs and Symptoms of a Concussion

CRT6™



Concussion Recognition Tool

To Help Identify Concussion in Children, Adolescents and Adults

What is the Concussion Recognition Tool?

A concussion is a brain injury. The Concussion Recognition Tool 6 (CRT6) is to be used by non-medically trained individuals for the identification and immediate management of suspected concussion. It is not designed to diagnose concussion.

Recognise and Remove

Red Flags: CALL AN AMBULANCE

If **ANY** of the following signs are observed or complaints are reported after an impact to the head or body the athlete should be immediately removed from play/game/activity and transported for urgent medical care by a healthcare professional (HCP):

- Neck pain or tenderness
- Seizure, 'fits', or convulsion
- Loss of vision or double vision
- Loss of consciousness
- Increased confusion or deteriorating conscious state (becoming less responsive, drowsy)
- Weakness or numbness/tingling in more than one arm or leg
- Repeated Vomiting
- Severe or increasing headache
- Increasingly restless, agitated or combative
- Visible deformity of the skull

Remember

- In all cases, the basic principles of first aid should be followed: assess danger at the scene, check airway, breathing, circulation; look for reduced awareness of surroundings or slowness or difficulty answering questions.
- Do not attempt to move the athlete (other than required for airway support) unless trained to do so.
- Do not remove helmet (if present) or other equipment.
- Assume a possible spinal cord injury in all cases of head injury.
- Athletes with known physical or developmental disabilities should have a lower threshold for removal from play.

If there are no Red Flags, identification of possible concussion should proceed as follows:

Concussion should be suspected after an impact to the head or body when the athlete seems different than usual. Such changes include the presence of **any one or more** of the following: visible clues of concussion, signs and symptoms (such as headache or unsteadiness), impaired brain function (e.g. confusion), or unusual behaviour.

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CRT6™

Developed by: The Concussion in Sport Group (CISG)

Supported by:



International
Olympic
Committee





CRT6

Concussion Recognition Tool

To Help Identify Concussion in Children, Adolescents and Adults



1: Visible Clues of Suspected Concussion

Visible clues that suggest concussion include:

- Loss of consciousness or responsiveness
- Lying motionless on the playing surface
- Falling unprotected to the playing surface
- Disorientation or confusion, staring or limited responsiveness, or an inability to respond appropriately to questions
- Dazed, blank, or vacant look
- Seizure, fits, or convulsions
- Slow to get up after a direct or indirect hit to the head
- Unsteady on feet / balance problems or falling over / poor coordination / wobbly
- Facial injury

2: Symptoms of Suspected Concussion

Physical Symptoms	Changes in Emotions
Headache	More emotional
"Pressure in head"	More Irritable
Balance problems	Sadness
Nausea or vomiting	Nervous or anxious
Drowsiness	
Dizziness	
Blurred vision	
More sensitive to light	
More sensitive to noise	
Fatigue or low energy	
"Don't feel right"	
Neck Pain	

Changes in Thinking

Difficulty concentrating

Difficulty remembering

Feeling slowed down

Feeling like "in a fog"

Remember, symptoms may develop over minutes or hours following a head injury.

3: Awareness

(Modify each question appropriately for each sport and age of athlete)

Failure to answer any of these questions correctly may suggest a concussion:

"Where are we today?"

"What event were you doing?"

"Who scored last in this game?"

"What team did you play last week/game?"

"Did your team win the last game?"

Any athlete with a suspected concussion should be - IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PRACTICE OR PLAY and should NOT RETURN TO ANY ACTIVITY WITH RISK OF HEAD CONTACT, FALL OR COLLISION, including SPORT ACTIVITY until ASSESSED MEDICALLY, even if the symptoms resolve.

Athletes with suspected concussion should **NOT**:

- Be left alone initially (at least for the first 3 hours). Worsening of symptoms should lead to immediate medical attention.
- Be sent home by themselves. They need to be with a responsible adult.
- Drink alcohol, use recreational drugs or drugs not prescribed by their HCP
- Drive a motor vehicle until cleared to do so by a healthcare professional

Appendix B – Return to Rowing Plan

A concussion is a serious event, but you can recover fully from such an injury if the brain is given enough time to rest and recuperate. Returning to normal activities, including sport participation, is a stepwise process that requires patience, attention, and caution.

Each step must take a **minimum of one day** but could last longer, depending on the athlete and their specific situation. A physician, preferably one with experience managing concussions, should be consulted before beginning the gradual process to return.

The athlete should spend a minimum of 24 hours at each step before progressing on to the next. It is common for an athlete's symptoms to worsen slightly with activity. This is acceptable as they progress through steps 1 to 3 of return to sport, so long as symptom exacerbation is:

- **mild:** symptoms worsen by only one to two points on a zero-to-10 scale, and
- **brief:** symptoms settle back down to pre-activity levels within an hour.

STEP 1: Symptom limited activity – Goal: A gradual reintroduction of activity

Light cognitive and physical activity (such as daily activities and light chores) can be initiated as long as they don't worsen symptoms beyond the acceptable mild and brief levels described above.

STEP 2: Light aerobic exercise – Goal: Increased heart rate

Activities such as walking or stationary cycling. The athlete should be supervised by someone who can help monitor for symptoms and signs. Light resistance training as tolerated can be incorporated. The duration and intensity of the aerobic exercise can be gradually increased over time if symptoms or signs during the exercise or the next day remain within acceptable range.

STEP 3: More Diverse Cardio – Goal: Add movement

Activities such as light running or gentle body weight resistance exercises can begin at Step 3. There should be no body contact or other jarring motions such as high-speed stops or hitting a baseball with a bat.

STEP 4: Building Cardio with Increased Cognitive Aspects - Goal: Exercise, coordination, & increased thinking

Activities such as indoor rowing and increased resistance training can be added to activities from previous steps. Can incorporate agility type movements and other coordination related activities at this Step.

Proceed to Step 5 only after medical clearance in writing and completed return to school (if applicable)

STEP 5: On water practice, once cleared – Goal: Restore confidence & assess functional skills by coaching staff

Coaches will allow return to the water in gradually challenging conditions. Start on water activities in a crew boat or a boat with stabilising pontoons. All rowers should have a steady state row (20-40 minutes) in calm water for their first on the water experience. Subsequent practices for flat water rowers can incorporate intensity bursts and intervals. Coastal rowers can then also incorporate light to moderate waves and then boat entry and exits.

Symptoms? Return to previous step and only engage in activities as tolerated. Medical clearance will be required again before resuming Step 5.

No symptoms? Proceed to Step 6 after minimum of two on water situations without symptoms.

STEP 6: Competition

Return to sport with normal activities

** Core of Return to Rowing Plan from Parachute Canada (parachutecanada.org/concussion) Revised March 24, 2024, with specific to rowing additions.

Appendix C – Handout for any Athlete Removed with Suspected Concussion

ROW ONTARIO

Concussions

Removal from Sport Procedures



We are concerned about the long-term health of all our participants. We have instituted a Concussion Management Policy to help protect their health and in compliance with Ontario's Rowan's Law.

The policy is that if any individual suffers any kind of injury where there is potential for there to have been direct or indirect force to the head, neck, face, or upper body AND is experiencing or demonstrating any concussion related signs or symptoms, the individual will be removed from activity immediately.

The designated person to make this decision will be the coach and/or regatta host. In the case of a suspected concussion, the individual may not be in a condition to assess themselves or make appropriate decisions. The decision will be made erring on the side of caution in support of the long-term health of the participant.

For individuals under 18, all suspected concussions or situations that occurred that potentially could result in a concussion will be reported to their guardian. The guardian should monitor the individual for delayed signs and symptoms for the next 72 hours.

All individuals of any age with a suspected concussion should see to a medical doctor (or nurse practitioner) for medical assessment and diagnosis.

A CONCUSSION is a serious event, but you can recover fully from such an injury if the brain is given enough time to rest and recuperate. Returning to normal activities, including sport participation, is a step-wise process that requires patience, attention, and caution.

If diagnosed with a concussion, please turn over for a rowing specific return to sport protocol. Remember that each individual and each concussion is different and individualized medical advice should be followed.

*For more information and ROWONTARIO's complete Concussion Policy please go to:
www.rowontario.ca/rowontario-concussion-management-information/*

ROW ONTARIO



Return to Rowing Protocol

If you are diagnosed with a concussion, follow the stages to return under medical guidance

Each step must take a **minimum of one day** but could last longer, depending on the athlete and their specific situation. A physician, preferably one with experience managing concussions, should be consulted before beginning the gradual process to return.

The athlete should spend a minimum of 24 hours at each step before progressing on to the next. It is common for an athlete's symptoms to worsen slightly with activity. This is acceptable as they progress through steps 1 to 4 of return to sport, so long as symptom exacerbation is:

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Symptoms? Return to previous step and only engage in activities as tolerated. Medical clearance will be required again before resuming Step 5.

No symptoms? Proceed to Step 6 after minimum of two on water situations without symptoms.

STEP 6: Competition

Return to rowing with normal activities