



Soft or Padded Headgear in Non-Helmeted Sports Position Statement

National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

The NFHS SMAC has developed the following position statement regarding soft or padded headgear products in non-helmeted sports:

The NFHS does not consider soft or padded headgear products as effective equipment in preventing a concussion in non-helmeted sports. As explained below, soft or padded headgear products may be worn in non-helmeted sports that allow for such optional equipment, but the intent of that equipment should be for reasons other than concussion prevention. Valid scientific research should be pursued to more definitively determine evidence-based efficacy regarding using such products to decrease the incidence of concussion. However, no currently available soft or padded headgear can prevent a concussion.

The NFHS recommends caution in using soft or padded headgear devices to permit medical clearance of a student-athlete, if he or she would otherwise not be medically cleared to participate in sports. Currently, wearing such headgear as a condition to play in order to prevent another concussion is not scientifically or medically supported; therefore, a medical waiver for wearing this type of equipment in the case of hastening return to play after a concussion is inappropriate. However, this equipment may be used to cover lacerations and sutures, if these devices are deemed appropriate within the sport's playing rules.

Current design and recommended use of these devices do not address the proposed mechanism of concussive injury, that being acceleration, deceleration and rotational forces acting on the brain. Schools should refer to equipment standards from the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE), American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM), and the Hockey Equipment Certification Council, Inc. (HECC), when considering protective equipment for student-athletes, and monitor that the equipment is being used for mitigating the risk of injuries for which the equipment is designed.

When considering the use of optional soft or padded headgear products in non-helmeted sports, athletes and coaches should take the time to read the qualifying statements provided with such products that address specific limitations, particularly those related to preventing serious head injuries. Wearing such products may provide a false sense of security in concussion protection to student-athletes, coaches and parents. Moreover, a false sense of security in concussion protection may increase the likelihood that players, coaches and parents will consider a given medical condition to be adequately addressed and may cause them to place less importance upon avoiding head impact, reporting concussion symptoms and recovering fully before returning to play.

The NFHS SMAC will continue to monitor developments in soft and padded headgear and will consider adjustments to its position should valid scientific and clinical evidence arise.

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