



ATHLETIC LIABILITY

Risk Management Manual

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Disclaimer:

The materials contained in the Athletic Manual are a collection of best practices and resources, assembled to provide you and your district guidance through the process of developing your own district's unique athletic policies and procedures.

All information provided in the training material is general in nature and is not intended to replace professional legal advice.

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Introduction

Students participating in athletic activities are at a higher risk for injury than the general school population. Some activities pose a greater risk and require implementing a higher degree of caution and safety to protect students from harm. Every coach needs to be aware of his legal obligations to the students entrusted in his care and the steps he needs to follow to keep them safe.

In the world of risk management this obligation is deemed *'having a duty'*. Coaching duties can be imposed in many ways, through contracts, job descriptions and even tort law. The following information contained in this manual is a basic playbook for the new coach and a reminder to the seasoned staff member. This manual will try to help guide you through the maze of requirements and procedures you are expected to follow when working with students in school-athletic activities. It is not an exhaustive list but following the basics outlined will help reduce your chances of incidences, injuries and litigation.

There are many 'players' a coach must interact with including students, other coaching staff, parents, spectators and administration. They often overlook the entities that can help them stay out of the "Penalty Box"; their district risk manager, the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, and their school district insurance provider.

- ❖ If your district is small, it may not have a specific person called a 'Risk Manager' but someone in your district is responsible for working with your insurance pool to file incident reports, work on claims and help reduce liability and property costs. They are often located within the business office or facilities department in your district.
- ❖ The Washington Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) is the best resource for information, training and guidance on school athletic best-practices pertinent to the state of Washington.
- ❖ You also work for a district that is a member of the Washington Schools Risk Management Pool (WSRMP). Their Loss Control Department is comprised of professional staff highly skilled in school liability. They can provide guidance through extensive resources, research, trainings and personal visits.

Together these entities can make a formidable team in helping coaches reduce the risk of injuries, incidents and the possibility of litigation.

Questions concerning this manual should be directed to the Loss Control Department, Washington Schools Risk Management Pool by calling 1-800-488-7569.

Standards of Care

As every coach knows, you can't play the game if you don't know the rules. This is especially true in regards to safety and compliance. Who sets the rules and guidelines for you to be a successful coach?

- ❖ On a national level there is the National Federation of High School Associations¹ (NFHS) and on a state level the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association² (WIAA). These entities provide specific rules and regulations you must follow to compete in school athletic events. They standardize playing fields, equipment and rules. They also can analyze data from a large pool of information to help identify best-practices for keeping students safe.
- ❖ Your administration has specific rules and procedures you must follow. School Board policies can often be extensive and overwhelming but you are still responsible for knowing and adhering to them as an employee of the school district.
- ❖ You may also work under an athletic department director who is responsible for providing you with specific rules for your team or activity.
- ❖ Many coaches do not realize they are also answerable to the standards set by courts of law in negligence cases. Your risk manager or the Washington Schools Risk Management Pool³ (WSRMP) is a great resource in helping you understand what the court says your responsibilities are.

¹ www.nfhs.org

² www.wiaa.com

³ www.wsrmp.com (please contact to request member log-in information)

The Basics:

I. Proper Activities:

Coaches in public schools have a duty to provide activities that are deemed suitable for their students while meeting current legal requirements. Federal and state laws must be followed to insure eligibility and discrimination issues are addressed. Activities selected must be appropriate for the student's age group and level of abilities. Often school districts are unaware that some sports are considered inherently too dangerous or inappropriate for public schools to sponsor. There are activities that are too new to have standards developed for guidance.

- ❖ **Title IX** does not set quotas, but it does establish need for districts to demonstrate fairness in athletic opportunities. Schools do not necessarily need to offer identical sports, yet they do need to provide an equal opportunity for females to play in sports of interest.
 - Budgets for athletic programs may differ as long as districts can demonstrate the equipment and facilities are of equitable quality.
 - Each district must designate a Title IX Coordinator who is available to school faculty, staff and students. Title IX complaints may be filed with the coordinator or directly to the Office of Civil Rights. Title IX protects the identity of those who report problems and prohibits acts of retaliation.

- ❖ **IDEA, ADA and Section 504** all have rules regarding students who have special needs. Many times coaches and athletic staff are unaware which of their students have learning disabilities, or other qualifying issues. Students who fall under these federal guidelines also have specified confidentiality rules that must be followed. If you are unclear what you are required to do when dealing with these students, never ignore the issue, but ask your administration for guidance. Develop a relationship with your special services department who oversee these requirements. They can be a great resource.
 - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal regulation that insures students with learning disabilities and other identified limitations obtain an appropriate education.
 - Section 504 is part of the Civil Rights Act that prohibits discrimination of students with disabilities.

Extra-curricular activities such as athletics are not specifically addressed in these regulations but it is important to be aware that you may have a team member who has a disability that can affect how he understands and processes information or participates. Be prepared to modify your instructions and allow additional time for students to learn rules and techniques. Never match students who may be unequal in abilities as well as size.

- Students, who have special needs, may have different discipline requirements. Always work with special services staff to review any specific limitations or behavioral modification guidelines.
 - Title I and II of ADA stipulates that leagues must make themselves accessible to any player or coach with a disability. The National Federation of High School Sports makes no mention in their general bylaws regarding disabled athletes or coaches. As long as there is no undue burden, Districts may need to modify or change specific rules, policies, facilities, and competition requirements to accommodate.
- ❖ **WIAA** is the standard Washington State follows for determining what an appropriate extra-curricular athletic activity is for students. When a district chooses to sponsor a sport not approved by WIAA, it automatically allows itself to be liable for not following the standard set in our state.
- A school district does not need to sponsor non-WIAA activities. Local Park and Recreation groups and other non-district entities may have a lacrosse team, equestrian or sailing club. These organizations do not have to follow the same standards as a public school. If proper steps are implemented they can protect the district, its funds, reputation and staff from litigation.

See Appendix for an Athletic Extra-Curricular Form to help you document what is and is not approved WIAA activities.

- Does your district have a facility use agreement with another entity that sponsors these activities? Does the written agreement clearly detail who is liable and the rules that must be followed? If information is disseminated at school do the materials plainly state this is not a district sponsored activity?

See Appendix for a Sample Facility Use Agreement Form

- When district staff oversees summer activities and other athletic events such as camps, do they and the participants understand when they are and are not working as district employees?

See Appendix for Athletic Camp Matrix

- If your district sponsors or has students participate in non-WIAA approved activities, or you have staff who oversee activities out of the normal school term, it is important to notify your risk manager or WSRMP to help provide appropriate steps to minimize the risk to your district and employees.

II. Proper Facilities:

Coaches have a duty to insure the areas where students practice and compete meet the requirements for the activity. WIAA and NFHS have specifications for league and competitive play. All activities must be in a physical environment that is safe. Outdoor and indoor facilities have hazards that coaches and students should be able to recognize. Performing regularly scheduled inspections is essential for insuring safety.

- ❖ Every facility and sport has specific safety needs. Lit fire exits, fire extinguishers, appropriate padding, properly lit fields, rescue equipment (pool), etc. Know and abide by all local regulations as well as specific policies for that facility or playing area.
 - Perform a pre-inspection of the activity area prior to arrival of students and document any hazards seen.
 - Refrain from using areas that may be dangerous. If the field is too wet, or the ventilation is not working, be prepared to cancel activity or provide an alternative that would be safer.
 - Provide for proper repair or notification of maintenance needed. Follow up to insure corrections were completed.
 - Ensure your staff and student athletes understand facility safety issues and how to identify them, including emergency equipment and evacuation routes.

- ✓ Tip: Develop and use a written checklist specific for each facility/area and the safety equipment required. WSRMP has various sample checklists developed for your use in the Appendix.

Environmental Issues: Coaches must be aware of the environmental risks associated with outdoor activities such as temperature and lightning.

- ❖ **Excessive Heat** - Exercising in the hot weather causes water loss through sweating. Allow students unrestricted access to water and encourage frequent breaks for athletes to re-hydrate. Designate someone to insure all the students are drinking their water. Carbonated beverages or those containing caffeine should not be offered. The two most common health affects to exercising in heat are Heat Strokes and Heat Exhaustion. Both are considered medical emergencies and require immediate medical help.
 - The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA)⁴ and the Gatorade Sports Science Institute (GSSI) recommend that coaches:
 - Arrange proper medical coverage at all practices and games
 - Acclimate the young athletes to the heat over a two-week period
 - Minimize the amount of equipment and clothing worn by players in hot and humid conditions, particularly during the acclimation period
 - Weigh in athletes before and after practices to monitor sweat loss and dehydration
 - Allow proper fluid replacement to maintain hydration

⁴ To view the entire statement, please visit http://www.nata.org/publicinformation/files/youth_football.pdf.

- Provide proper rest periods during and in-between practice sessions. Arrange practice and rest in shaded areas and during cooler times of the day
 - Have players remove their helmets during rest breaks during both practices and games, as well as in-between periods and at halftime. With the football helmet on at all times in hot and humid weather, the body core temperature can increase and can play a role in the development of a heat illness
- ❖ **Excessive Cold** – exposure to excessive cold may be an infrequent problem but should be recognized. The human body’s mechanisms for heat retention are significantly less efficient than our ability to dissipate heat. Epidemiological research suggests that even in otherwise innocuous environmental conditions, hypothermia and frostbite can occur. The best method of management is prevention. If your athletes must be out in cold and /or wet weather ensure they:
- Dress in layers
 - Cover the head to prevent excessive heat loss from the head and neck
 - Stay dry by wearing a wicking fabric next to the body and a breathable, water repellent outer layer
 - Stay adequately hydrated
 - Eat regular meals
 - Avoid alcohol, caffeine and nicotine

Educate participants, coaches, officials and administrators in recognition of cold-related illnesses. There are two cold-related pathologies that coaches and athletes should be aware of: *hypothermia and frostbite*.

- ❖ **Hypothermia** is defined as a decrease in the core body temperature to at least 95° F. It occurs when body heat is lost faster than it can be produced. Since hypothermia can happen over a period of time and its onset is gradual, often victims can be unaware. Hypothermia is categorized in three stages based on core body temperature.
- Mild Hypothermia - shivering, cold sensation, goose bumps, numb hands.
 - Moderate Hypothermia - intense shivering, muscle coordination, slow and labored movements, mild confusion, difficulty speaking, signs of depression, withdrawn.
 - Severe Hypothermia - shivering stops, exposed skin is bluish and puffy, inability to walk, poor muscle coordination, muscle rigidity, decrease in pulse and respiration rate, unconsciousness.
- ❖ Frostbite is a thermal injury to the skin, which can result from prolonged exposure to moderate cold or brief exposure to extreme cold. Air temperature, wind speed, and moisture all affect how cold the skin becomes. Strong winds lower skin temperatures by dispersing the thin protective layer of warm air that surrounds our bodies. Wet or damp clothing act as a conductor of heat, drawing it away. The evaporation of moisture on the skin also produces cooling. For these reasons, wet skin or clothing on a windy day can lead to frostbite even if the air temperature is

above the freezing mark. The body areas most prone to frostbite are the hands, feet, nose, ears and cheeks.

If unsure whether an athlete is hypothermic, or suffering from frostbite, err on the side of caution and treat accordingly.

- ❖ **Lightning** - Lightning may be the most frequently encountered severe storm hazard endangering physically active people each year. Millions of lightning flashes strike the ground annually in the United States, causing nearly 100 deaths and 400 injuries. Three quarters of all lightning casualties occur between May and September, and nearly four fifths occur between 10:00 am and 7:00 pm, which coincides with the hours for most athletic events. At the first sign of a potential storm, be sure to seek safe shelter.

Remember: Athletes and coaching staff are often focused on athletic activities and may be unaware of environmental hazards, symptoms of heat or cold related exposures or sudden changes in weather. It is important to stay alert and be prepared.

III. Proper Equipment:

Coaches Have a Duty to Provide Appropriate Equipment. The higher the risk of injury in an activity, the greater the need is for protective equipment and following standardized guidelines. Good documentation and logical reasoning for equipment selection, purchase and usage is vital to show due diligence in providing proper care and safety. This also includes items purchased by others or donated to the district and the replacement of equipment as it ages.

- ❖ Develop a complete list of what student athletes will need to participate safely in each activity (such as appropriate footwear). Coaches need to emphasize to students the importance of proper fitting and wearing of all athletic gear and why they should *never* modify the equipment.
 - Distribute the list to your participants at the start of each activity.
 - Routinely discuss with the students what equipment they will need to provide themselves and the policy of no practice or game playing if they are not in compliance.
 - With cross–gender issues be prepared to answer questions such as; are there any different padding requirements for a female in football than males?

- ❖ Proper selection and installation of equipment is vital. Coaches need to demonstrate they select the most appropriate equipment for the activity, not the cheapest. Retaining relevant paperwork is essential. All manufacturer and installer information, purchase orders, warranties and other pertinent information needs to be maintained in a central file for safe recordkeeping until the equipment is disposed of.
 - For contractor installed equipment, it is important to get a signed statement that indicates the item was installed to specifications of the manufacturer. In case of failure and possible injuries, the installer can be held liable.
 - Retain written documentation of all equipment inspections, maintenance and part replacement. Use only approved replacement parts that meet the requirements of the manufacturer.

- ❖ Develop a program that addresses equipment purchased by outside groups or donations. School booster clubs and local community organizations often wish to donate or give items to athletic teams. Sometimes these ‘free’ gifts can cost a school district a substantial amount of money. They may be outdated, or non-compliant with current safety standards.
 - Work with your business office to develop appropriate steps for accepting donations or gifts. Properly following procedures will mitigate audit problems, legal fines and possibly disgruntled feelings.

- ❖ In sports that require helmet protection (football, baseball, softball, etc), coaches must ensure all equipment meets either the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) or American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) standards.⁵
 - School athletic departments need to follow the current standards established

⁵ Verify newest standards for helmet certification and recertification at:

<http://www.nocsae.org/standards/documents.html>

in regards to helmet care and upkeep.

- Football helmets require annual reconditioning and certification by a reputable company. The WIAA or the Washington Schools Risk Management Pool can provide coaches updated information regarding these requirements.

 - ❖ Develop written policy/procedures that specify coaches will follow the manufacturer's recommendations and/or established standards for equipment maintenance and repair. Develop procedures to secure equipment when it is not usable. If there is a safety concern, the equipment must be secured to prevent access or use until proper maintenance or disposal can be completed.
 - Make sure you have the ability to track equipment assignment, reconditioning, repair requests and when it was removed (destroyed) from service.
 - Helmets deemed unusable must be destroyed so they can never be placed in service again. Crushing, cutting or other destructive methods should be used.

 - ❖ Implement daily and pre-game inspection of all equipment. Schedule yearly reconditioning or replacement of equipment as part of regular routine and keep records for documentation.
- ✓ Tip: See Appendix for sample safety guidelines

IV. Proper Instruction:

Coaches Have a Duty to Provide Appropriate Instruction. Analyzing and breaking skills into small steps appropriate for each athlete's cognitive ability is important. Students should be instructed in WHY they need to do certain things as well as shown HOW. Be aware of students who may have learning disabilities and require extra help with verbal or written instructions.

- ❖ Instruction of skills must be done in a progressive format. Teach basic steps then proceed onto the next level only when your students demonstrate competence. Reviews of basic fundamentals at every level will increase an athlete's performance while reducing likelihood of injuries.
 - ❖ If you cannot physically perform the technique it is imperative someone on staff can show all the proper steps. One-on-one coaching is important to reinforce both positive and inappropriate techniques.
 - Consider your size and strength when matched with a student for demonstration.
 - ❖ Safety should be a part of each lesson plan and practice session. Be sure to document specific safety training, defining the hazards for each activity and specific safety skills and equipment required. Administer verbal *and* written quizzes to demonstrate/document that students understand how to apply safety principals (Why must you keep your head up? If I do this, what may happen?).
 - Utilize safety charts and posters in locker rooms and other areas to provide additional reinforcement on the importance of safety.
- ✓ Tip: Always make sure players are correctly matched by size, weight and experience. Remind Coaches they must never scrimmage against players.

V. Proper Supervision:

Coaches have a duty to provide proper supervision for students. Negligent supervision is the number one claim made in regards to school liability cases. In the eyes of the court, if you cannot physically see the student – you are not supervising them. Sending the student team manager with a master key into the building to fetch additional equipment is not appropriate. So how will you make sure no student is in the locker room unattended while others are still coming off the field and collecting equipment?

- ❖ Develop a written plan defining how you will handle specific situations such as when students are allowed in locker rooms, exiting and entering the field before all athletes are ready and boarding and unloading buses at away games.
 - Hazing, harassment and horseplay usually occur in unsupervised locker rooms. Provide same-sex supervision in locker rooms. Many coaches implement an all in/all out policy for students. The students do not leave the locker room until everyone is ready. No one leaves the field until everyone is finished.
 - Proper instruction and written guidelines removes confusion and possible mistakes. Students need to be informed of expectations and rules so they do not accidentally fail to adhere to the rules and know the consequences for breaking them.

- ❖ Having adequate assistance in helping with practice and games is important. Volunteers and district employees as well as parent helpers can be beneficial if properly trained and supervised. Be sure to address 'how' to properly supervise students during practices, games and away tournaments.

- ✓ Tip: Have parents, volunteers, and student athletes review policies and sign they understand.

VI. Proper Discipline

Coaches have a duty to maintain control on and off the field. Parents, players and other school employees and volunteers need to understand who is in charge and responsible from the moment the athletes enter the locker room until they are returned to their parents care. Coaches ought to wear a shirt or other type of consistent uniform that can be easily recognized and conveys authority. Whistles help to maintain authority but should not be overused. *Physical discipline is not acceptable.* Many civil suits have been brought against coaches regarding the use of physical or verbally abusive discipline. Refrain from off-the-cuff statements such as 'Drop and give me 100 push-ups' or 'Stay after practice for 1 hour'. ALWAYS follow your pre-established discipline guidelines.

Districts must also be aware of the possibility of violence or danger that may occur during or after a game. It is the responsibility of the coach, the Athletic Director and school administration to have safety procedures and security patrol in place to monitor and diffuse any issues.

- ❖ Know and follow district policies and procedures regarding discipline and appropriate behavior. Students, who have been identified as special needs, may have different discipline requirements. Keep an updated copy of relevant policies in your coach's manual for easy reference.
- ❖ Provide consistent and proper discipline techniques on and off the playing field. Prepare written guidelines establishing what types of discipline will be used and for what types of infractions. Have the Athletic Director and/or School Board review guidelines to insure they are consistent with district policies and appropriate.
- ❖ Never belittle or demean a student – Be careful how you or others correct a student, especially in front of other players or spectators.
- ❖ Provide students and staff with proper instructions regarding types of appropriate discipline. Using player & parent contracts requiring their signature of understanding, outlining expectations of behavior and consequences is an important tool for all activities.
- ❖ Be alert to actions that could be mistaken for favoritism. Issues can arise if family members or others are perceived to be treated differently. This includes allowing preferential treatment, or simply selecting same the student to do tasks.

VII. Behavior Issues

Coaches have a duty to insure students are not subjected to or participate in inappropriate behaviors. Athletic activities should always be fun. The "win at all costs" attitude is not appropriate for players, parents or coaching staff. Fostering an atmosphere of healthy competition that emphasizes cooperation, and a positive self-image, rather than just winning, truly makes your team number one. Other behavioral issues coaches need to address include incidents of bullying, harassment and hazing.

- ❖ Coaches are required to know and implement their district policies, and reporting procedures regarding bullying, harassment and hazing. Coaches need to disseminate these policies and procedures regarding student, staff, and spectator behavioral expectations. Train students on the definition of bullying, hazing and sexual harassment; give examples of acts and behaviors that are considered bullying, hazing and sexual harassment. Inform them about grievance procedures, disciplinary action, and no-retaliation rules. Make the training age appropriate.
 - Have all students, their parents, volunteers and coaching staff sign a contract prior to start of the season outlining the rules of acceptable and non-acceptable behavior and consequences of any infractions.
 - Post copy of guidelines for behavior and consequences in locker room. Place a copy in student handbook or newsletter distributed annually to students and their parents. Give copy of the guidelines to athlete's parents at the pre-season meeting.
 - Post list of rules for spectator behavior in prominent place by stands or bleachers where they can be seen and read.
 - Provide in-service training for all staff including volunteers and parent helpers to address such issues. Provide them with written copies also.
 - ❖ Coaches should implement an open-door policy. Being aware and alert can mean the difference between stopping a minor issue and dealing with a major problem.
 - Encourage students to report any incidents promptly.
 - Always intervene immediately when you hear any instances of ridicule, harassment, bullying, threats, extortion or physical violence.
 - Remind district employees they are required to report all suspected abuse.
 - ❖ Coaches must be aware of the policies and clearance procedures the district has adopted to deal with employees/volunteers.
 - There are regulations concerning background checks for those who work with students. No one can be exempted from this requirement.
 - Staff, volunteers and students should be made aware of the expectations and consequences for sexual harassment and issues of improper touching.
 - Proactive steps such as staff & student education and training with scheduled reviews can help prevent incidents.
- ✓ Tip: Clearly explain to all players what is not acceptable and the appropriate consequences of infractions. This includes using any derogatory terms or name-calling even in fun.

VIII. Parents and Permission

Even with rigorous training and proper safety equipment contact and non-contact sports have inherent dangers that put young athletes at risk for injuries. *Coaches Have a Duty to provide student athletes and their parents with information regarding the inherent risks associated with the activity so they can make an informed consent.* They also must obtain permission from parents authorizing the student's participation, transportation and release for emergency medical treatment.

- ❖ Each sport has its own specific risks athletes may face in participation. Once parents and students understand the risks they can give what is called 'informed consent'. It is important that you utilize a release for each activity that identifies the risks inherent to that particular sport.

✓ Tip: WSRMP has provided you with sample inherent risk forms in the Appendix.

- ❖ During an emergency there is no time to think about how you can contact a guardian or adult. Plan ahead and be ready. Obtain medical release so students can be treated by emergency medical staff. Make sure parents update emergency information often. More information is found in section IX of this manual.
- ❖ Transporting students in non-district owned vehicles or allowing students to drive each other leaves coaches and districts open for liability. Insure you have policies addressing how students will be transported to and from school property and adhere to them. Sometimes parents ask to drive their own student home after an away game or want to take another child also. Know how do address last minute requests.
 - All student athletes who travel with a team to an away athletic event must return to the school with the team. The only exception to this policy is when both the coach and parent/guardian agree that it is beneficial for the student athlete to ride home with the parent/guardian. Student athletes are not to ride home from athletic events with any other person.
 - If the district is not providing transportation to events off campus, it is best to divorce the district from the liability. Notify participants and their guardians that the district is not providing student transportation to the event, and that parents/guardians are responsible for arranging for transportation of their children.
 - If student transportation is in a district-owned vehicle, the school system vehicle liability coverage is applicable to any vehicular accident. If student transportation is by private vehicle, the vehicle owner's liability coverage is applicable to any vehicular accident. Parent or other adult drivers should be aware that they may be held responsible for injuries to any individuals they are transporting.
 - *Students should never transport other students.* There are numerous restrictions in Washington State on when a new driver may have passengers under 18 in their vehicle since they are inexperienced drivers.

Parent/Guardian Pre-Season Meeting: Prior to the beginning of each athletic season, it is advised you conduct an informational evening for parents and students. The topics you should cover include:

- ❖ **THE ACTIVITY SPECIFIC INHERENT RISKS:** Review the specific inherent risks for the activity with both the parents and the student. Obtain signed consent form stipulating both parent and student understand the specific inherent risks.
- ❖ **STUDENT ATHLETE INSURANCE:** Contact the Washington Schools Risk Management Pool to inquire of policies and procedures for supplemental student athletic policies.
- ❖ **EQUIPMENT:** Discuss the equipment students will need to provide themselves and why purchasing appropriate equipment is important. Review policy of no practice or game playing if they do not bring their mouth guards, jock straps, etc. Emphasize the importance of proper fitting and wearing of all athletic gear and why students or others should never modify the equipment without your direct supervision.
- ❖ **BEHAVIORS:** Review what expectations you have for both players and spectators during games and practices. In writing have the guidelines clearly outlined as well as any discipline and consequences. Review no-tolerance policies and consequences with students and sign form stating they understand.
- ❖ **EMERGENCY TREATMENT CARDS:** Parents must give written authorization for emergency medical treatment in the event of an injury and they are not present. This must include treatment on site, transportation to emergency facility and treatment at the emergency facility. The Emergency Treatment card should also include any relevant information such as known allergies and pre-existing medical conditions.
- ❖ **TRANSPORTATION ISSUES:** Prior to the start of the activity, you must determine if there will be a need for students to be transported from the school campus to another facility. How often will this occur? Who is responsible for providing the transportation, the district or the parents?

IX. Health and Medical Issues

Coaches have the duty to keep student athletes safe and healthy. Before the student steps into the gym or on the playing field, there are requirements that must be met to insure each student is capable and ready to participate. All student athletes must have a physical exam in compliance the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) recommendation 18.13.0. This recommendation should be followed unless your district has adopted a more stringent policy. History of previous illness and injuries, specifically head injuries must be documented before any type of training activities or organized practice begins.

Coaches should know the physical condition of their athletes and set practice schedules accordingly. Students may falsely assume they will 'get in shape' from participating in the activity. Parents and coaches need to be aware that students of the same age can differ greatly in physical size, abilities and maturity levels. Document that you have informed the students and their parents concerning the need for obtaining proper muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, and cardio-respiratory fitness before the start of any sport season. Group activities according to skill level and size, not chronological age, particularly during contact sports. If this is not practical, then modify the activity to accommodate the needs of the players with varying skill levels.

- ✓ Tip: Review physical demands required for the sport at pre-season meeting and on the parent's permission form.

Pre-existing Health Issues: Coaches and appropriate staff need to be aware of any students with specific medical conditions. Asthma, diabetes and other chronic conditions may require self-medication and additional care. Make sure you and your staff can recognize signs and symptoms of pre-existing conditions and when they may require intervention. It is best to be proactive, work with your school nurse, trainer, and the student's parents, and their medical care provider to develop a plan of action and mitigate any risks.

- ❖ Require parents to meet with their medical care provider and obtain clear written guidelines for the athlete's condition and the proper use of the medication during practices, home games and away.
- ❖ Meet with parents, the school nurse and the athlete to review this information and obtain signed consent that the student and parents understand the information and guidelines. Retain a copy of this information in files and with your emergency cards.
- ❖ Have a plan for handling need for self-medication, or emergency medical help if self administered treatment is not effective.
- ❖ Have release from physician allowing student to self-medicate and carry medications with him to activities if required, in accordance with your district's Board Policies.
- ❖ Keep assistant coaches and others with a need-to-know informed. Always remind them of the district's confidentiality policies (HIPAA/FERPA) when discussing medical information.

- **Confidentiality Laws:** New regulations dictate student's medical information is protected and shared only in a need-to-know basis. How will you and your staff or players handle confidentiality and the media in times of emergencies? Work with your Human Resources and school nurse to insure you and all your staff understand and comply with medical confidentiality rules.
- **Eating Disorders and Steroid Use:** Coaches need to be aware of signs of eating disorders specifically in sports with weight requirements. Be aware of signs of steroid use. Never encourage players to use or try any products. Report all suspected cases of eating disorders or steroid use immediately to the Athletic Director or School Principal for further investigation.

Have a component on nutritional education in their program and distribute hand outs both the parents and student athletes. Educate players and their parents about the hazards of over the counter and illegal products such as bulking up powders, vitamin supplements and steroids.

- **Illegal Drug Use:** Washington State Supreme Court ruled on March 13, 2008 that random drug testing of student athletes was unconstitutional. Contact WSRMP for information regarding proper procedures for implementing testing in cases of suspected drug abuse.

Emergency Medical Care: *Coaches have a duty to provide appropriate emergency medical services to all injured athletes and in a timely manner.* Student athletes have bodies that are still growing and can put them at risk for injuries from over use and impact. Both types include injuries to the soft tissues (muscles and ligaments) and bones. Special consideration must be given for those involving trauma to the neck, spinal cord, and growth plates. Develop written guidelines for athletic event medical emergencies. Have adequate equipment to provide emergency medical care at both home and away activities. Have staff trained in using all emergency medical equipment provided. Arrange for professional medical help if required including transport and emergency facilities.

WSRMP and WIAA strongly recommend athletic personnel associated with practices, competitions, skills instruction and strength and conditioning to be certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation techniques (CPR), first aid, concussion assessment and prevention of disease transmission (as outlined by WISHA guidelines).

- ❖ **Athletic Trainers:** Senate Bill 5530 (RCW 18.250) took effect on July 1, 2008. This new law deals with licensing of persons who offer athletic training services. An athletic trainer must now hold a license issued by Department of Health (DOH) in order to practice in Washington State. Exemptions from licensing requirements apply to: Credentialed health care providers performing services within their scope of practice, Students in an athletic training educational program, and school teachers or coaches who do not represent themselves as athletic trainers. Refer to unlicensed district

employees as trainers, not athletic trainers. For additional information contact local Washington State Department of Health.

Emergency Medical Plans: Athletic injuries may occur at any time and during any activity. The sports medicine team must be prepared by formulating an emergency plan, providing proper coverage of events, and maintaining appropriate emergency equipment and supplies⁶.

Several legal cases have found that appropriate medical care for an injured athlete was delayed due to the lack of a comprehensive and *venue specific* emergency plan. The courts deem that organizations that sponsor athletic activities have a duty to develop an emergency plan that can be implemented immediately and to provide appropriate standards of health care to all sports participants. The following elements are recommended for inclusion in an Athletic Emergency Plan by the National Athletic Trainers' Association⁷.

❖ **Personnel**

- All personnel involved with the organization and sponsorship of athletic activities share a professional responsibility to provide for the emergency care of an injured person, including the development and implementation of an emergency plan.
- The emergency plan should be developed in consultation with local emergency medical services personnel including paramedics, and local medical facilities that may receive an injured athlete.
- Identifies specific personnel involved in carrying out the emergency plan.
- Outlines the qualifications of those executing the plan. Defining who must be trained in automatic external defibrillation (AED), cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), first aid, and prevention of disease transmission (Universal Precautions).
- The emergency plan should specify the equipment needed to carry out the tasks required in the event of an emergency.
- The emergency plan should outline the location of the emergency equipment. Further, the equipment available should be appropriate to the level of training of the personnel involved.
- Establishment of a clear mechanism for communication to appropriate emergency care service providers and identification of the mode of transportation for the injured participant.
- Emergency plans should incorporate the emergency care facilities to which the injured individual will be taken.
- The emergency plan specifies the necessary documentation required and identifies the personnel responsible for completing during emergency.

⁶ See <http://www.usafootball.com/articles/displayArticle/5452/4615> for additional information

⁷ National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Emergency Planning in Athletics *Journal of Athletic Training* 2002;37(1):99–104 by the National Athletic Trainers' Association, Inc www.journalofathletictraining.org

- The emergency plan for each sport/activity should be reviewed and rehearsed at least annually.

❖ **Equipment**

- All necessary first aid equipment should be at the site and quickly accessible.
- Equipment should be in good operating condition. To ensure that emergency equipment is in working order, all equipment should be checked on a regular basis and documented.
- Athletic Emergency Team Personnel must receive appropriate training for these devices and should limit use to devices for which they have been trained. Use of equipment should be regularly rehearsed by emergency personnel and documented.
- Health professionals and organizational administrators need to recognize that recent guidelines published by the American Heart Association call for the availability and use of automatic external defibrillators and that defibrillation is considered a component of basic life support. Improvements in technology and emergency training require personnel to become familiar with the use of automatic external defibrillators, oxygen, and advanced airways. (See WSRMP Loss Control Bulletin #43A).

❖ **Communication**

- Access to a working telephone or other telecommunications device, whether fixed or mobile, should be ensured.
- The communications system should be checked before each practice or competition to ensure proper working order.
- A back-up communication plan should be in effect in case the primary communication system fails.
- A listing of appropriate emergency numbers should be either posted by the communication system or readily available, as well as the street address of the venue and specific directions (cross streets, landmarks, and so on).

❖ **Transportation**

- The emergency plan should encompass transportation of the sick and injured.
- Emphasis should be placed on having an ambulance on site at high-risk events.
- Emergency medical services response time should also be factored in when determining on-site ambulance coverage. Consideration should be given to the level of transportation service that is available (e.g., basic life support, advanced life support) and the equipment and training level of the personnel who staff the ambulance.
- In the event that an ambulance is on site, a location should be designated with rapid access to the site and a cleared route for entering and exiting the venue.

- ✓ Tip: WSRMP has a sample Venue Specific Emergency Protocol Plan in the appendix; use it as a template to help you develop site specific plans.

Once the emergency plan has been committed to writing – the next step is to implement it by educating all stakeholders of their roles and responsibilities. Additionally holding annual drills will provide important communication between district staff and local emergency personnel to identify weaknesses and potential problems in the plan.

Return to Play/Practice: *Coaches have a duty to ensure students, who have suffered injuries, are released by a medical care provider before they return to play and practice.*

When it comes to returning an injured athlete to play, the physician is in charge. Any athlete who is under a physician's care for illness or injury may not return to conditioning, practice sessions, or competition without a signed Return to Play Form. Always work with your athlete's parents, and their medical care provider to document any limitations or restrictions. The form should include both physician and parent signatures. Retain all documentation until student reaches the age of 21.

❖ **Head Injuries:** *It is essential that an athlete who is symptomatic from a head injury not be allowed to participate in contact or collision activities until all cerebral symptoms have subsided. Always require a physician's release clearly indicating the student is completely released and can resume athletic activities.*

- **Concussion** is a traumatic brain injury that occurs when an outside force impacts the head hard enough to cause the brain to move within the skull or if the force causes the skull to break and directly hurts the brain. A rapid acceleration and deceleration of the head can force the brain to move back and forth across the inside of the skull. The stress from the rapid movements pulls apart nerve fibers and causes damage to brain tissue.
- **Second Impact Syndrome (SIS):** Of all the risks associated with premature return to play, Second Impact Syndrome is the most serious. If a player returns to competition before the symptoms of a first concussion have completely cleared, even a minor blow to the head or to another part of the body that causes the head to jerk suddenly can result in a loss of auto-regulation of the brain's blood supply. The impact may cause blood vessels to tear, a blood clot to form, and the brain to swell. This creates pressure on the brain stem, which controls breathing. Breathing failure then causes the athlete to collapse. SIS can result in paralysis, mental disabilities and epilepsy. Death occurs in 50% of the cases.

The maturing brain in a child means the need to manage head injuries and concussions in a more conservative manner. Almost all reported cases of second- impact syndrome are in young athletes under the age 18.

Remember:

- ❖ Teach athletes how to protect themselves against head injuries.
- ❖ Encourage all staff to become trained in identifying and assessing head injuries and emergency protocols not just the trainers.

- ❖ Establish a detailed plan that deals with head injuries and requirements prior to students return to the practice field.
- ❖ Ensure all protective equipment fits properly and is used as intended by the manufacturer.

Sport helmets are designed primarily to prevent catastrophic injuries (i.e., skull fractures and intracranial hematomas) and are not designed to prevent concussions. A helmet that protects the head from a skull fracture does not adequately prevent the rotational and shearing forces that lead to many concussions. Although wearing a helmet will not prevent all head injuries, a poorly fitted helmet is limited in the amount of protection it can provide. Coaches must play an active role in enforcing the proper fitting and use of the helmet.

Injury Reporting Guidelines: It is important coaching staff, volunteers and trainers understand the need to report all injuries and incidents that occur at practice and games. Work with your district risk manager or WSRMP to develop guidelines and reporting procedures. Provide staff and volunteers with information regarding the documentation of injuries / incidents during games and practices. Incidents that need to be reported include;

- ❖ Student injuries that occur at athletic events, other than minor scrapes or bruises.
- ❖ All student injuries where 911, EMT, or other outside medical assistance is called to the scene.
- ❖ All student injuries where the student is taken from school or a school event to a physician or hospital either by the school or a parent or guardian.
- ❖ Student injuries involving the head, neck or back; other than minor scrapes or bruises.
- ❖ Injuries that involve a defect in school equipment, or in school facilities (actual or perceived).
- ❖ Student injuries that involves burns from any source, or electrical shock.
- ❖ Student injuries involving exposure to, ingestion of, or contact with chemicals.
- ❖ Student seizures, whether related to trauma or medical condition. (It is important to specify what action was taken by school personnel in dealing with the seizure.)
- ❖ All drug-related incidents, whether overdose or reaction from prescription drugs or illegal substances.
- ❖ All student incidents involving loss of consciousness. (Students suffering from a loss of consciousness should be examined by a physician.)
- ❖ All student incidents where a student goes into shock.
- ❖ Student injuries involving entering, exiting, or while riding on a school bus, other than minor scrapes or bruises.
- ❖ All injuries or complaints involving significant privacy issues of students.

Develop guidelines for submitting all incident reports within 24 hours to appropriate district office.

X. Documentation and Reporting

Coaches have a duty to document and record steps taken to provide students, staff, parents and volunteers with needed information. No matter how careful you are and how many safeguards you put in place, there will be incidents and accidents. If you document the steps you implemented to keep students and others safe, it is much easier to prove your due diligence.

- ❖ Students may come back, up to age 21, to recover costs for losses. Parents cannot sign away a student's right to litigate. Anytime there is a serious injury that may result in a claim it is important to keep supporting documentation such as safety quizzes, handouts and other materials with the report of the injury. Retain the documentation with the student's file until they reach past the age of 21. Work with your risk manager or WSRMP to maintain the proper documentation.
- ❖ Volunteers and non-district employees, including parent helpers need to be screened and complete formal background checks. They should also be requested to sign a release/ hold harmless agreement indicating they understand the school district cannot provide for their medical coverage and injuries.

✓ Tip: WSRMP has provided a sample Volunteer Release Form in the Appendix