



SOFT HEADGEAR IN NON-HELMETED SPORTS POSITION STATEMENT

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

There is currently no consistent medical evidence to support the use of soft headgear products to prevent concussion. Their design and recommended uses do not address the suspected mechanisms of concussive injury: acceleration, deceleration and rotational forces acting upon the brain. The permissive use of soft headgear in some non-helmeted sports is allowed, but the intent of the usage should not be concussion prevention.

The use of soft headgear may produce unintended consequences, including providing a false sense of security to athletes, potentially leading to more aggressive play, thus increasing injury risk. A false sense of security may also result in athletes, coaches and parents/guardians placing less emphasis upon avoidance of head impact and foul play, concussion education and the immediate reporting of concussion symptoms.

The NFHS SMAC is aware of reports of athletes with a history of concussions being returned to play contact sports wearing soft headgear in an attempt to lessen further concussion risk. The NFHS SMAC strongly advises against using soft headgear as a justification to permit medical clearance of an athlete who would otherwise not be medically cleared to participate in a contact sport. However, soft headgear may be used to cover soft tissue injuries (such as lacerations and sutures) if deemed appropriate within the sport's playing rules.

When considering the use of soft headgear in non-helmeted sports, athletes, parents/guardians and coaches should read the manufacturers' instructions that address specific limitations in preventing injuries to the head and brain. Additionally, they should read the warning labels and should monitor that the equipment is being used as intended.

Valid scientific research should be pursued to more definitively determine the ability of soft headgear to decrease the incidence of concussion. The NFHS SMAC will continue to monitor research and will consider revision of this position statement should significant evidence arise.

In summary, protective headgear is required by NFHS rules in some sports and is permissive in others. Hard helmets can decrease the incidence of certain head trauma, such as skull fractures and subdural hematomas. Soft headgear may protect against cuts and bruises to the scalp and

forehead. Coaches, athletes and parents/guardians should review the manufacturers' warnings about proper usage and performance limits of such products. **No helmet or headgear can prevent athletes from suffering concussions, and all sports should be played, coached and officiated in recognition of that fact.**

**Revised and Approved April 2017
June 2013**

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