



## 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 20<sup>th</sup>, 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

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. Row Ontario staff and volunteers recognize that symptoms may not appear immediately and that concussions can occur in many different situations. In the case of a suspected concussion, the individual may not be in a condition to assess themselves or make appropriate decisions.

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, 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 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

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 (Stage 5 of the Standard Return to Rowing Strategy as found in Appendix B).

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.

Competition (Stage 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.)

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

*Review date: March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022*

## Appendix A – Signs and Symptoms of a Concussion

### Pocket CONCUSSION RECOGNITION TOOL™

To help identify concussion in children, youth and adults



#### RECOGNIZE & REMOVE

Concussion should be suspected **if one or more** of the following visible clues, signs, symptoms or errors in memory questions are present:

##### 1. Visible clues of suspected concussion

Any one or more of the following visual clues can indicate a possible concussion:

- Loss of consciousness or responsiveness
- Lying motionless on ground/SLOW to get up
- Unsteady on feet/Balance problems or falling over/Incoordination
- Grabbing/Clutching of head
- Dazed, blank or vacant look
- Confused/Not aware of plays or events

##### 2. Signs and symptoms of suspected concussion

Presence of any one or more of the following signs & symptoms may suggest a concussion:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of consciousness</li> <li>- Seizure or convulsion</li> <li>- Balance problems</li> <li>- Nausea or vomiting</li> <li>- Drowsiness</li> <li>- More emotional</li> <li>- Irritability</li> <li>- Sadness</li> <li>- Fatigue or low energy</li> <li>- Nervous or anxious</li> <li>- "Don't feel right"</li> <li>- Difficulty remembering</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Headache</li> <li>- Dizziness</li> <li>- Confusion</li> <li>- Feeling slowed down</li> <li>- "Pressure in head"</li> <li>- Blurred vision</li> <li>- Sensitivity to light</li> <li>- Amnesia</li> <li>- Feeling like "in a fog"</li> <li>- Neck Pain</li> <li>- Sensitivity to noise</li> <li>- Difficulty concentrating</li> </ul> |
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##### 3. Memory function

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

- "What venue are we at today?"
- "Which half is it now?"
- "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 PLAY**, and should not be returned to activity until they are assessed medically. Athletes with a suspected concussion should not be left alone and should not drive a motor vehicle.

It is recommended that, in all cases of suspected concussion, the player is referred to a medical professional for diagnosis and guidance as well as return to play decisions, even if the symptoms resolve.

##### RED FLAGS

**If ANY of the following are reported then the player should be safely and immediately removed from the field. If no qualified medical professional is available, consider transporting by ambulance for urgent medical assessment:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Athlete complains of neck pain</li> <li>- Increasing confusion or irritability</li> <li>- Repeated vomiting</li> <li>- Seizure or convulsion</li> <li>- Weakness or tingling/burning in arms or legs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deteriorating conscious state</li> <li>- Severe or increasing headache</li> <li>- Unusual behaviour change</li> <li>- Double vision</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

##### Remember:

- In all cases, the basic principles of first aid (danger, response, airway, breathing, circulation) should be followed.
- Do not attempt to move the player (other than required for airway support) unless trained to do so
- Do not remove helmet (if present) unless trained to do so.

from McCrory et. al, Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport, Br J Sports Med 47 (5), 2013

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## 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 stage-wise process that requires patience, attention, and caution. Each stage must take a minimum of one day but could last longer, depending on the athlete and their specific situation. If symptoms reappear at any stage, go back to the previous stage until symptom-free for at least 24 hours.

### **Stage 1: Symptom limited activity – Goal: A gradual reintroduction of activity**

After an initial short period of rest of 24-48 hours, light cognitive and physical activity can be initiated as long as it does not worsen symptoms. A physician, preferably one with experience managing concussions, should be consulted before beginning the staged process to return.

### **Stage 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. No resistance training or weightlifting. The duration and intensity of the aerobic exercise can be gradually increased over time if no symptoms or signs return during the exercise or the next day.

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

**No symptoms?** Proceed to Stage 3 after 24 hours.

### **Stage 3: More Diverse Cardio – Goal: Add movement**

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

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

**No symptoms?** Proceed to Stage 4 after 24 hours.

### **Stage 4: Building Cardio with Increased Cognitive Challenges - Goal: Exercise, coordination, and increased thinking**

Activities such as indoor rowing and resistance training can be added to activities from previous stages.

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

**No symptoms?** The time needed to progress will vary with the severity of the concussion and with the athlete. Proceed to Stage 5 only after medical clearance.

### **Stage 5: On water practice, once cleared by a doctor – Goal: Restore confidence and assess functional skills by coaching staff**

Coaches and instructors will allow return to the water in gradually challenging conditions.

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

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

### **Stage 6: Competition**

Return to sport with normal activities

## Appendix C – Handout for any Athlete Removed with Suspected Concussion

### ROWONTARIO

#### 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 stage-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 stage of the return protocol must take a **minimum of one day** but could last longer, depending on the athlete and their specific situation.*

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



## ROWONTARIO

### Return to Sport Protocol

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

#### **STAGE 1: Symptom limited activity – Goal: A gradual reintroduction of activity**

After an initial short period of rest of 24-48 hours, light cognitive and physical activity can be initiated as long as they don't worsen symptoms. A physician, preferably one with experience managing concussions, should be consulted before beginning the staged process to return.

#### **STAGE 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. No resistance training or weight lifting. The duration and intensity of the aerobic exercise can be gradually increased over time if no symptoms or signs return during the exercise or the next day.

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

**No symptoms?** Proceed to Stage 3 after 24 hours.

#### **STAGE 3: More diverse cardio – Goal: Add movement**

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

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

**No symptoms?** Proceed to Stage 4 after 24 hours.

#### **STAGE 4: Building upon cardio with increased cognitive challenges**

**Goal: Exercise, coordination, and increased thinking**

Activities such as indoor rowing and resistance training can be added to activities from previous stages.

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

**No symptoms?** The time needed to progress will vary with the severity of the concussion and with the athlete. **Proceed to Step 5 only after medical clearance.**

#### **STAGE 5: On water practice, once cleared by a doctor – Goal: Restore confidence and assess functional skills by coaching staff**

Coaches and instructors will allow return to the water in gradually challenging conditions.

**Symptoms?** Return to previous stage and only engage in activities as tolerated. If symptoms persist consult a physician.

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

#### **STAGE 6: Competition**

Return to sport with normal activities