

Seminar begins to discuss policy to reduce concussions in sports

Published: Friday, November 18, 2011, 9:42 PM Updated: Friday, November 18, 2011, 9:50 PM



By **Jackie Friedman/The Star-Ledger**

The dangers of concussions remain on the forefront of the minds of state leaders in medicine and healthcare who are banding together to advocate for policy change and proactive measures they say will assist in the prevention and treatment of concussions.

In their first Sports Medicine Seminar since **the passage of a state law requiring high schools** to develop concussion policies, neuropsychologists, orthopedic surgeons and athletic trainers gathered yesterday at St. Joseph's Medical Center in Paterson to discuss what steps should be next.

Suggestions from the medical community range from better safety equipment to eliminating kickoffs from football. There is also support for New Jersey to borrow and implement a law recently passed in Arizona requiring student-athletes to complete a course on concussion awareness prior to starting their athletic season.

Neuropsychologist Rosemarie Scolaro Moser said "underreporting" remains a huge concern, citing a 2004 study in which 66.4 percent of those who sustained a probable concussion "did not think it was serious enough" to report.

"You are seeing kids play sports year-round, multiple sports, early on," Moser said. "You increase your athletic exposures, you're going to increase your probability of getting a concussion."

The Athletic Trainers' Society of New Jersey uncovered astounding numbers in a survey of 100 schools during the



Aristide Economopoulos/The Star-Ledger

Randolph seventh grade football players, Jets owner Woody Johnson, State Sen. Richard Codey and former NFL players watch Gov. Chris Christie sign a bill last year aimed at preventing concussions in student-athletes across New Jersey's interscholastic youth sports programs.

High school athletes tackle sports concussions

High school athletes risk serious long-term brain damage when they ignore the symptoms of a concussion, but many young athletes do just that. From the tough-it-out culture of sports to the desire not to let one's team down in a pinch, high school athletes are often tempted to keep symptoms like persistent headaches, blurry vision and light sensitivity to themselves. As the captain of the West Morris Central football team in 2006, Kevin Saum kept his blinding headaches a secret from his coach and trainer – and ended up having emergency brain surgery. Though he dreamed of playing college football, Saum, now a student at Rutgers University, will never play contact sports again. And while most people think of sports like football and ice hockey when they think of concussions, one of the most dangerous sports is cheerleading. The West Milford High School cheerleading team has had two serious concussions in the last year – and many more minor ones. (Video by Nyier Abdou/The Star-Ledger)

Fall 2010 sports season; 1,066 concussions were reported — an average of 10.7 per school. Football had the highest reported incident rate with 670, girls soccer players suffered 182, boys soccer 148 and field hockey 66.

In 23 percent of these cases, symptoms lasted for more than two weeks. The ATSNJ plans to repeat the survey after this fall season concludes.

The ATSNJ also surveyed 110 schools to determine compliance with a law that became effective Sept. 1 stating secondary schools must have a written policy concerning prevention and treatment of sports-related head injuries. Thirteen of those schools (12 percent) still have not adopted a formal policy, the survey found.

Medical professionals discussed a need for further accountability, especially making sure athletes don't return to play too early.

"When you have a concussion, your head is a magnet for another one," Moser said. "We have to practice good brain hygiene."

Jackie Friedman: jfriedman@starledger.com

© 2011 NJ.com. All rights reserved.

Related coverage:

• **Kids and Concussions: The Star-Ledger's 3-part series on the effects of head injuries in young athletes**

• **Gov. Christie signs legislation creating concussion awareness and prevention program**