

MIDWEST SUPER LEAGUE

Concussion & Player Safety Protocol

2026-27 Season

WHEN IN DOUBT, SIT THEM OUT.

For all coaches, referees, parents, and club administrators

Section 1: Policy Statement

1.1 Commitment to Player Safety

The Midwest Super League is committed to the health and safety of every player. Head injuries and concussions are serious medical conditions that require immediate attention and a structured return-to-play process. No match result is worth risking a player's long-term health.

1.2 Legal Compliance

All MSL member clubs must comply with their respective state's concussion legislation. All seven MSL states (MN, ND, SD, NE, MO, IA, WI) have youth sports concussion laws that require removal from play and medical clearance before return. MSL policy meets or exceeds these requirements.

1.3 Who This Applies To

This protocol applies to all players, coaches, referees, and club staff participating in MSL league play, including regular season matches, cross-pod weekends, and any MSL-sanctioned events.

Section 2: Recognizing a Concussion

2.1 What is a Concussion

A concussion is a brain injury caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head, or a hit to the body that causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull. A player does NOT need to lose consciousness to have a concussion.

2.2 Signs Observed by Others

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Moves clumsily or has balance problems
- Answers questions slowly or is confused
- Cannot recall events before or after the hit
- Shows behavior or personality changes
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)

2.3 Symptoms Reported by Player

- Headache or pressure in the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, foggy, or groggy
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Confusion or 'not feeling right'

2.4 Critical Rule

If any ONE of the above signs or symptoms is present after a head impact, the player must be immediately removed from play. Do not wait to see if it gets worse. When in doubt, sit them out.

Section 3: Immediate Response Protocol

3.1 Remove from Play

Any player suspected of having a concussion must be immediately removed from the match. This decision can be made by:

- The referee
- The player's coach
- A designated medical professional (if present)
- A parent/guardian of the player

The player may NOT return to play in the same match under any circumstances, even if symptoms appear to clear.

3.2 Assess the Player

Once removed, the player should be:

- Taken to a quiet area away from the field
- Monitored continuously for worsening symptoms
- Not left alone
- Not given medication without medical guidance
- Not allowed to drive themselves home (if of driving age)

3.3 Emergency Situations

Call 911 immediately if the player experiences:

- Loss of consciousness for more than a few seconds
- Seizure or convulsion
- Worsening headache that does not go away
- Repeated vomiting
- Increasing confusion or agitation
- Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Slurred speech

3.4 Notification

The coach must notify the player's parent/guardian immediately if not already present. The coach must also report the incident to their club administrator within 24 hours.

Section 4: Return-to-Play Protocol

4.1 Overview

A player who has been removed from play due to a suspected concussion may NOT return to MSL competition until they have completed the following graduated return-to-play protocol AND received written medical clearance from a licensed healthcare provider.

4.2 The 6-Step Return Protocol

Each step must take a minimum of 24 hours. If symptoms return at any step, the player must go back to the previous step.

- Step 1: Complete physical and cognitive rest until symptom-free
- Step 2: Light aerobic activity (walking, swimming) - no resistance
- Step 3: Sport-specific exercise (running drills, no head impact)
- Step 4: Non-contact training (passing, shooting, fitness)
- Step 5: Full-contact practice (with medical clearance)
- Step 6: Return to match play

4.3 Medical Clearance Required

Before progressing to Step 5 (full contact), the player MUST provide written clearance from a licensed physician, nurse practitioner, or certified athletic trainer. This clearance must be submitted to the club and kept on file.

4.4 Minimum Timeline

Given the 6 steps with 24 hours minimum between each, the absolute minimum time from removal to return is 6 days. In practice, full recovery often takes 2-4 weeks for youth players. There is no rushing this process.

4.5 League Notification

Clubs must notify the MSL league office when a player is removed for a suspected concussion and again when they are cleared to return. The league tracks these incidents for player safety purposes.

Section 5: Emergency Action Plan

5.1 Club Responsibilities

Every member club must have a written Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for their home venue(s). This plan must include:

- Address of the facility (for directing emergency services)
- Location of the nearest hospital/urgent care
- Designated person to call 911 if needed
- Location of first aid kit and AED (if available)
- Access route for emergency vehicles
- Emergency contact protocol for reaching parents

5.2 Coach Requirements

All MSL coaches are expected to:

- Hold a current first aid/CPR certification (recommended)
- Complete a concussion awareness training annually
- Carry emergency contact information for all players at every match
- Know the EAP for their home venue
- Have a charged cell phone available at all matches

5.3 Available Resources

The MSL recommends the following free concussion training resources:

- CDC HEADS UP online training (free, 30 minutes)
- US Soccer concussion guidelines
- State-specific concussion training (varies by state)

Clubs should incorporate concussion education into their annual coach training.

Section 6: Additional Safety Guidelines

6.1 Heat-Related Illness

During periods of extreme heat, coaches and referees should:

- Provide mandatory water breaks every 20-30 minutes
- Monitor players for signs of heat exhaustion
- Shorten halves if heat index exceeds 95F (see Weather Policy)
- Ensure adequate shade and water are available

6.2 Lightning Safety

If lightning is observed or thunder is heard, play must be suspended immediately. See the MSL Weather & Lightning Policy for complete details. Minimum 30-minute wait after last lightning/thunder before resuming.

6.3 Field Safety

Before every match, coaches or the field marshal should inspect:

- Goals are properly anchored (tip-over prevention)
- Field is free of holes, glass, debris, or standing water
- Goal nets are not torn in a way that could trap a player
- Corner flags are flexible (not rigid)

6.4 Injury Reporting

Clubs should report any serious injury (ambulance called, suspected fracture, head/neck/spine injury) to the MSL league office within 24 hours. This helps the league monitor safety trends and improve protocols.