



HELMET REMOVAL

Never remove an injured player's helmet unless directed to do so by a medical authority or to provide lifesaving care.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

American Red Cross

- A coach should suspect a head, neck, or back injury if the player is unconscious after being tackled or hit, or the helmet has been cracked or broken.
- If a head, neck, or back injury is suspected, activate the Emergency Action Plan and follow the emergency action steps, [Check-Call-Care](#).
- Except in rare instances, the helmet and shoulder pads of an injured athlete should not be removed. An injured athlete can most often be cared for with the helmet and shoulder pads left on.
- It is recommended that only the facemask be removed. A tool to remove the facemask should be in the first aid kit.
- Examinations and transportation by medical personnel can take place with the helmet and shoulder pads left in place.
- The only instance in which an athlete's helmet and shoulder pads should be removed is when a medical authority believes that it is necessary for the care of the athlete, or if the equipment interferes with the rescuers' ability to provide required CPR.

FOR INJURIES TO THE HEAD, NECK, AND BACK...

Minimize movement of the player's head, neck, and back by putting your hands on both sides of the player's head. Maintaining an open airway using the jaw-thrust maneuver. If possible, have the player remain in the position that you found him or her until EMS personnel arrive and take over.

A football player who sustains a suspected spinal injury should have his helmet left on until both the helmet and shoulder pads can be carefully removed together in a hospital emergency room under controlled stabilized conditions by a professional medical staff. Removing an injured athlete's helmet and/or shoulder pads carries the inherent risk of further injury. The primary reason to remove an athlete's helmet and shoulder pads is if a medical authority believes that its removal will enhance the care of the athlete or if it interferes with the rescuers' ability to provide required CPR.

The most devastating injuries in all of sport are to the head, neck, or back. If the athlete is cared for in the proper manner, one may prevent further injury or death. It is critical that all individuals involved in sports be trained to know what to do should this type of injury occur.

The helmet and shoulder pads of an injured athlete should not be removed until a head, neck, or back injury has been completely ruled out by a medical authority, or if the equipment interferes with the rescuers' ability to provide required CPR. If a head, neck, or back injury is suspected, an athlete should be cared for with the equipment left in place.

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If you suspect a player has a head, neck, or back injury, tell him not to nod or shake his head but to answer questions by saying yes or no. The goal is to minimize movement. Activate the Emergency Action Plan, and follow the emergency action steps, **Check- Call-Care**. **Check** the scene for safety and check the athlete. **Call** 9-1-1 or the local emergency number when needed. **Care** for the player until EMS personnel arrive.

To care for injuries to the head, neck, and back:

- Follow basic precautions to [prevent disease transmission](#)
- Minimize movement of the player's head, neck, and back by putting your hands on both sides of the player's head. Maintain an open airway using the jaw-thrust maneuver. If possible, have the player remain in the position that you found him until EMS personnel arrive and take over.
- Monitor the player's airway, breathing, and circulation.
- If the injury appears significant, remove the player's facemask with a special tool.

Medical examinations and ambulance transport can take place with the helmet and shoulder pads left in place. Having the helmet on may be an advantage in immobilizing and transporting the injured athlete because it may keep the athlete in an appropriate anatomical position.

Coaches should be able to remove the facemask of an injured athlete quickly and easily. While performing this task, the head, neck, and back must be supported so that no movement of the neck will occur. The removal of the facemask can be accomplished using several different tools. A coach should check with the team physician, certified athletic trainer, or emergency medical technician for advice on the best tool to be used in removing the facemask. In most cases, removing the facemask will give a responder access to the face and mouth of the injured athlete if CPR or rescue breathing becomes necessary.

If removal of the helmet is necessary, loosen straps and pull directly backward. Obtain available assistance to minimize neck movement and to maintain the neck in a neutral position (level with the height of the shoulders). After the helmet is removed, keep the neck in the neutral position with manual support or by placing towels or clothing under the head. If the shoulder pads must be manipulated to provide chest compression do so carefully and with the least amount of movement. Maintain maximum neck control and move only as much as is required to provide effective chest compression.

MORE READING

Prehospital Care of the Spine-Injured Athlete by the Inter-Association Task Force for Appropriate Care of the Spine-Injured Athlete of the National Athletic Trainers' Association.

University of Pittsburgh Medical College Health System. Caring for the neck & spine. Retrieved from <http://www.upmc.edu/SportsMedCenter/repair-treat-rehab-neck-spine.htm>. Accessed June 11, 2002.

American National Red Cross and the United States Olympic Committee. (1997). Sport safety training handbook. San Bruno, CA: StayWell.

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