

# High school athletes take lead from coaches in reporting concussive symptoms, study finds

17 January 2013, by Elizabeth Hunter



A high school baseball scoreboard. High school athletes take their cue from coaches in reporting symptoms of concussion. Credit: Joe Mabel

In a recent study, UW researchers sought to understand why high school athletes do not report concussive symptoms. The researchers conducted focus groups with 50 male and female Seattle-area varsity athletes from a variety of sports. They learned that although athletes could list concussive symptoms and understood the possible long term complications, when faced with potential concussive injury scenarios, athletes said they would not report symptoms.

A number of factors seemed to underlie [athletes'](#) reluctance to report concussive symptoms. Most athletes wanted to play, and knew that reporting symptoms might cause them to be pulled from the game. Athletes also expressed hesitation to report symptoms if they didn't cause significant pain or prevent them from being able to play.

Concussive symptoms are nonspecific and athletes might attribute them another cause, such as viral illness. Athletes didn't want to be wrong about being injured and then look weak or be misjudged by their teammates or coach. Athletes took the lead from their coach. If their coach had encouraged athletes to report concussive symptoms, athletes were more likely to report.

New laws in many states require athletes to be taught about [concussion](#), but education alone is ineffective if it does not translate into concussive reporting behavior.

Dr. Sara P. D. Chrisman, an adolescent medicine fellow in the University of Washington Department of [Pediatrics](#), led the study. She said, "Our research suggests coaches have a larger role to play in concussive safety than they realize. They set the tone for concussive symptom reporting, and if they send a message that athletes should tell them when they have concussive symptoms, athletes might actually tell them. Coaches are central to concussion management."

The study was published in the *Journal of Adolescent Medicine* and funded by a University of Washington Graduate Medical Education grant and the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center.

Provided by University of Washington

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