Head Injury & Concussion Policy and Procedures

Issue: 1
Issue Date: January 2026
Review Date: January 2027
Responsible: Hitchin Netball Club Committee

The committee is collectively responsible for ensuring this policy is implemented, reviewed, and updated as required.

Purpose

This policy provides a consistent, evidence-based approach for the recognition, management, and safe return to play of any player who sustains a head injury or suspected concussion. It prioritises the safety and welfare of all players and aligns with:

- England Netball Concussion Resources
- World Netball Sport-Related Concussion Guidelines (2024)
- NHS Head Injury Guidance (111 / A&E recommendations)

A concussion is a traumatic brain injury caused by a direct or indirect force to the head resulting in temporary impairment of brain function. Symptoms may be physical, cognitive, emotional, or related to sleep and may not always be immediately apparent.

Any player with a suspected concussion, or where concussion cannot be ruled out, will be managed as if they have sustained a concussion.

Scope

Applies to:

- All Hitchin Netball Club players
- Coaches, first aiders, and team officials
- Parents/carers responsible for observing players following a head injury

It covers:

- Immediate on-court response
- Home monitoring and care
- Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) procedures
- Documentation and medical clearance requirements

Policy Statement

- Any player sustaining a head injury must be removed from play immediately.
- No player may return to training or matches on the same day as the injury.
- All players aged 18 years and under must observe a mandatory minimum 2-week rest period following concussion.
- A minimum of 48 hours is required between each GRTP stage.
- Full return to training or match play requires written medical clearance from an appropriately qualified healthcare professional experienced in concussion management (e.g. GP, physiotherapist, sports physician).
- Medical clearance must be documented in writing (signed note, letter, or email confirmation) and retained by the Club Safeguarding Officer before resumption of full training.
- Coaches, first aiders, and parents/carers must monitor the player for at least 24 hours following injury and escalate to emergency services if red-flag symptoms develop.
- Where there is any doubt, the player will not continue and will be treated as having a suspected concussion.

Procedures / Implementation

Immediate Post-Injury Care

1. Assess using the Concussion Recognition Tool 5 (CRT5). Where uncertainty exists, the player must be treated as having a suspected concussion and referred to an appropriately qualified healthcare professional.
2. Remove the player from play.
3. Provide Head Injury Advice handout to parents/carers.
4. All head injury incidents must be recorded using the Club's Accident / Incident Reporting Form and reported to the Club Safeguarding Officer within 24 hours.

Monitoring at Home

Players must be supervised for the first 24 hours following injury. Parents/carers should ensure:

- Physical and cognitive rest (including schoolwork, screens, loud noise, and bright lights).
- No alcohol, recreational drugs, sedative medication, or anti-inflammatories.
- Sleep is permitted; however, the player should be checked regularly to ensure they can be roused and respond appropriately.
- Symptoms are monitored closely and recorded.
- Parents/carers should notify the player's school if concussion is suspected.

Digital HIAS provision:

Written concussion advice must be provided and parental confirmation of understanding must be received before the player begins the Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) process.

The club will provide parents/carers with the Head Injury Advice Sheet (HIAS) in digital format via WhatsApp, which includes guidance on symptoms, home care, monitoring requirements and return-to-play guidance. Parental confirmation of receipt and understanding will be obtained via digital response (e.g. replying “RECEIVED”) and retained by the club as formal written evidence for safeguarding and record-keeping purposes.

Red-Flag Symptoms – Escalation to Emergency Care

Parents/carers must seek immediate emergency medical care (999 or A&E) if the player develops any of the following:

- Repeated vomiting
- Severe or worsening headache
- Increasing drowsiness or difficulty waking
- Weakness, numbness, or loss of coordination
- Convulsions or fits
- Confusion, unusual behaviour, or slurred speech
- Vision problems
- Clear fluid or blood from nose/ears
- Loss of consciousness at any point

Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) Protocol

Mandatory requirements:

- A minimum 2-week rest period must be observed following a confirmed or suspected concussion.
- A minimum of 48 hours must elapse between each GRTP stage.
- Progression through stages is permitted only when the player remains completely symptom-free.

If symptoms recur at any stage, the player must stop immediately and return to the previous asymptomatic stage after a minimum of 48 hours of rest and once symptom-free.

Players must successfully complete each stage without the return of symptoms before progressing. Written medical clearance from an appropriately qualified healthcare professional is required before entering Stage 5 (Full Training).

Stage	Activity	Objective / Notes
1	No activity	Full physical & cognitive rest until all symptoms resolve

2	Light aerobic activity (static bike, HR <70%, 20–30 mins, no resistance)	Increase heart rate; symptom-free for 24 hours
3	Netball-specific drills (predictable change of direction)	Add movement and sport-specific skills; symptom-free for 24 hours
4	Uncontested training (non-contact; resistance optional)	Increase coordination and cognitive load; symptom-free for 24 hours
5	Full training (after medical clearance)	Restore confidence and match readiness
6	Return to match play	Player must perform at or above pre-injury level

Documentation & Record Keeping

- All incident reports, parental confirmations, GRTP records, and medical clearances must be securely stored by the Club Safeguarding Officer.
- Records will be retained for a minimum of 3 years in accordance with data protection legislation.
- Documentation must be available for safeguarding audits or insurance requests if required.

Training Requirements

All coaches, first aiders, and team officials must complete England Netball Concussion Awareness Training every 2 years to ensure consistent implementation of this policy.

Monitoring and Review

This document will be reviewed annually by the HNC Committee, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, club operations, or England Netball guidance. The Committee will monitor implementation and compliance. All updates will be documented and communicated to members and volunteers.

References / Supporting Documents

England Netball Concussion Resources
World Netball Sport-Related Concussion Guidelines (2024)
NHS Head Injury Guidance (111 / A&E recommendations)