

Prehospital Care of the Spine Injured Athlete

Hatboro Horsham High School

Prehospital Care of the Spine-Injured Athlete

Proper on-the-field management of an athlete with a possible spine injury is crucial to prevent additional injury that is life-threatening or life-altering. The medical staff and coaches should make all possible efforts to maintain spinal stabilization until a neck injury is ruled out. If a suspected neck injury occurs the following should be followed:

1. A coach should maintain spine alignment to prevent any movement. No equipment should be removed at any time unless there is an obvious airway obstruction. Anytime there is a head injury, it should be assumed a neck injury also exists until ruled out.
2. Another coach should contact the Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) by cell phone. The coach should stop any practice, game, or activity around the athlete. If the patient is unconscious or not breathing, the coach should call 911. If the ATC is unavailable, 911 should be called.
3. The ATC will evaluate the injury. If a neck injury is suspected, the ATC will follow the recommendations laid out in the Prehospital Care of the Spine Injured Athlete document established by the Inter-Association Task Force for Appropriate Care of the spine injured athlete.
<http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/PreHospitalCare4SpineInjuredAthlete.pdf>
4. It is recommended that an athlete wearing a helmet and shoulder pads should not have their helmet removed except for very specific reasons. Removal of the helmet can cause unnecessary movement of the spine and cause poor alignment on the spine board due to the raising effect the shoulder pads has on the body.

It is recommended that communication is established between the school and the covering EMT Company to ensure an agreement on management philosophies to ensure proper and efficient care of an athlete with a suspected spinal injury.