



Athletic Liability Risk Management Manual

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Introduction

As a Coach, you are a risk manager. Daily, you are managing the risk around you. Your choices help mitigate risk for yourself, assistant coaches, volunteers, students, the school, and the district. While not all accidents are preventable, you can minimize the associated risks of an activity.

As the risk manager for your team, you are trying to do three things:

1. Minimize the opportunity for injury.
2. Reduce the severity of a possible injury. (This includes being prepared for and responding appropriately to emergencies.)
3. Protect your school and school district from liability exposures. (Work to reduce the severity and opportunity for a loss, and document all the steps you took to do so.)

Even though your school district is a member of the Washington Schools Risk Management Pool (WSRMP), injuries and property damage can still be costly to a school district. A focus on risk management not only keeps you and your students safe but it can help keep funds in your program.

The following information in this manual is a guide for the new coach and a reminder for the seasoned staff member. It outlines some duties owed to your student-athletes and the school community. It is not an exhaustive list, but following the advised processes will help reduce the opportunity for accidents, injuries, and resulting litigation.

Additional resources are available to you on the [WSRMP Members Website](#). Questions concerning this resource should be directed to the Risk Services Department at riskservices@wsrmp.com.

Standards of Care

Students participating in athletic activities are at a higher risk for injury than the general school population. Athletic activities pose a greater risk and require greater caution and safety to protect students from harm. Every coach needs to be aware of their legal obligations to the students entrusted in their care and the steps they can follow to help keep students safe. In the world of risk management, this obligation is referred to as *having a duty*. Coaching duties are imposed in many ways: through contracts, job descriptions, common practice, and even tort law.

Failure to meet coaching duties can result in a finding of negligence. Negligence is the unintentional doing or not doing of something that causes injury or damage to another. In our case, negligence is a failure to observe duties owed to student-athletes. Some may also call this “careless coaching.” Careless coaching may include, but is not limited to failures in supervision, training and conditioning, facility and equipment maintenance, and bullying and harassment prevention.

Claims often stem from the accusation that the district or school employee was negligent in some way – that someone was hurt because of a failure to use reasonable care, predict harm, or do what an ordinarily prudent person would have done under the same circumstances.

Four elements are involved when proving negligence in a court of law:

1. Somebody owed a duty.
2. They breached that duty.
3. Damages resulted.
4. The breach of duty was the proximate cause.

Among other things, courts will look at whether somebody took reasonable action, whether planning was in place, and if the potential for injury was foreseeable.

Let us look further into who sets the rules, duties, and guidelines to be a successful coach.

Associations: On a national level, there is the [National Federation of High School Associations \(NFHS\)](#) and, on a state level, the [Washington Interscholastic Activities Association \(WIAA\)](#). These entities provide specific rules and regulations you must follow to coach and compete in school athletics events. They identify best practices for keeping student-athletes safe and provide standards regarding playing fields, equipment, and game rules.

WIAA is the best resource for information, training, and guidance on school athletic best practices pertinent to the state of Washington.

School Administration: Your administration has specific rules and procedures you must follow. School board policies can often be extensive, but you are still responsible for knowing and adhering to them as an employee or volunteer of the school district. These policies are available through your human resources department and your school district’s website.

Department Supervisor: You may also work under an athletics department director responsible for providing specific rules for your team or activity.

US Court of Law: Many coaches do not realize they are also answerable to the standards set by courts of law in negligence cases. Your district's risk manager and [WSRMP](#) are excellent resources for helping you understand what the court says your responsibilities are.

Together, these entities can make a formidable team in helping coaches reduce the risk of injuries and the possibility of litigation.

A Coach's Basic Duties

As employees or volunteers of a school district, you work “in loco parentis,” meaning in place of parents. A parent expects their child to return to them in the same (or an improved) condition as when they left their care.

By the nature of your position, you owe students a high degree of care regarding the following duties:

- To warn.
- To provide appropriate activities.
- To provide safe facilities.
- To provide safe equipment.
- To train and instruct.
- To supervise.
- To provide proper discipline.
- To provide safe transportation.
- To keep athletes safe and healthy.
- To provide appropriate emergency care.
- To document and report.

To Warn

Coaches have a duty to provide student-athletes and their parents/guardians with information regarding the inherent risks associated with an activity so that they can make informed decisions.

Under no circumstances should a student be allowed to practice or play without signed permission from their guardian, as well as signed acknowledgment of the known and foreseeable risks of the individual sport. Even with rigorous training and proper safety equipment, contact and non-contact sports have inherent dangers that put student-athletes at risk for injuries. Each sport has its specific risks athletes may face. Guardians and student-athletes need the opportunity to examine the risks and choose whether they still want to participate in the sport. Once they understand the risks, they can give what is called *informed consent*. Document the informed consent in writing using an Informed Consent Form. By signing the form, parents/guardians acknowledge that they are aware that the inherent risks of the sport cannot be eliminated without jeopardizing the essential qualities of the sport and still choose to allow their students to participate.

- Use activity-specific Informed Consent Forms that identify the risks inherent to that sport.
 - Obtain signed Informed Consent Forms at the start of each new athletic season.
 - Sample Informed Consent Forms for WIAA-approved sports are available in English and Spanish on the [WSRMP Member website](#).
- Work with your administration to ensure these forms are stored and retained according to the district's record retention policy. Juries can view failure to produce copies of the signed consent forms as failure to warn. Essentially, *if it's not in the file, it doesn't exist*.

To help meet your duty to warn, conduct an informational meeting for guardians and students before the beginning of each athletic season. Topics may include:

- **The Activity-Specific Inherent Risks:** Review the specific inherent risks for the activity with both the guardians and the students. Obtain a signed consent form stipulating that both the guardian and student understand the specific inherent risks.
- **Medical Authorization Form:** Students will need written medical clearance from an authorized medical provider before participating in athletic programs. This health form should include all relevant information, such as known allergies and pre-existing medical conditions. This information must be kept confidential. If there is a concern for the student's safety based on the physical report, discuss this with your supervisor or school administration.
- **Equipment:** Discuss the equipment necessary for the student's participation in the activity and outline any required equipment the district will not provide. Emphasize the importance of correctly wearing athletic gear and that equipment must not be modified without district and manufacturer approval. Ensure guardians and students understand that appropriate equipment is mandatory for participation in practice and competition.

- **Behaviors:** Review behavior expectations for both athletes and spectators during games and practices. In a behavior contract, document expected conduct and the consequences for not following the agreement. Review this with student-athletes and guardians and obtain their written acknowledgment of the expectations.
- **Authorization to Treat:** Guardians must provide written consent for emergency medical treatment if their student is injured. Consent should include permission to treat onsite, transport to emergency facilities, and provide treatment at an emergency facility.
- **Transportation:** Discuss transportation needs and expectations for the season.
- **Review Concussion Management Policy:** Review your district's concussion and *Return to Play* protocols and procedures. The Zackery Lystedt law, [RCW 28A.600.190](#), requires that students and guardians sign a head injury information sheet that outlines recognizing the signs and symptoms of a concussion and the risks of returning to play with a concussion. WIAA has [concussion resources](#) for district use.
- **Review Sudden Cardiac Awareness:** Review your district's sudden cardiac arrest protocols and procedures. [RCW 28A.600.195](#) requires students and guardians to sign a sudden cardiac arrest information sheet yearly. A link to WIAA's Cardiac Awareness Pamphlet and Student/Parent Information Acknowledgment is [here](#).

To Provide Appropriate Activities

Coaches have a duty to provide activities deemed suitable for their students and meet current legal requirements.

Activities must be appropriate for the student's age group and level of abilities. WIAA is the standard in Washington State for determining an appropriate extra-curricular athletic activity for students. When a district chooses to sponsor a sport not approved by WIAA, it automatically allows itself to be liable for not following the standard set in our state. A school district does not need to sponsor non-WIAA activities. Students can seek these activities through local community groups and other non-district entities.

- If your district sponsors or has students participate in non-WIAA-approved activities, consider working with your district risk manager or WSRMP to help identify appropriate steps to minimize the risk to your program.
- If your district has a facility use agreement with another entity that sponsors these activities, create a written agreement detailing liability, insurance requirements, and rules or restrictions. If information about the non-district program is disseminated at school, ensure that the materials distinguish that it is not a district-sponsored activity.

Follow federal and state laws regarding eligibility and the handling of discrimination issues. IDEA, ADA, and Section 504 all have rules regarding students who have special needs.

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal regulation that ensures students with learning disabilities and other identified limitations obtain an appropriate education.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in areas of public life, including schools.
- Section 504 is part of the Civil Rights Act that prohibits discrimination against students with disabilities.

It is essential to be aware that you may have a team member with a disability that can affect how they understand and process information or participate. Be prepared to modify your instructions and allow additional time for students to learn rules and techniques. Never match students who may be unequal in abilities as well as size.

- Students who have special needs may have different discipline requirements. Work with special services staff to review specific limitations or behavioral modification guidelines.
- Title I and II of the ADA stipulate that leagues must make themselves accessible to any player or coach with a disability if there is no undue burden. Districts may need to modify or change specific rules, policies, or facilities to accommodate.

These federal guidelines have specified confidentiality rules. If you are unclear about what you are required to do when working with these students, never ignore the issue; ask your supervisor, administration, and special services program for guidance.

To Provide Safe Facilities

Coaches have a duty to ensure the areas where students practice and compete meet the requirements for the activity.

Conduct activities in environments that are safe and meet sport-specific requirements. WIAA and NFHS outline facility and environmental specifications for league and competitive play.

Facility Inspections

Regularly scheduled inspections are essential for ensuring student safety. Coaches must understand and follow all local regulations and specific district policies for that facility or playing area. Every facility and sport has specific safety needs, such as illuminated fire exits, charged fire extinguishers, appropriate padding, properly lit fields, complete rescue equipment (pool), etc.

Developing and using a written checklist specific to each facility/area is crucial. This includes regular inspection of the required safety equipment.

- Inspect fields, tracks, bleachers, and facilities regularly, especially before practice and games.
- Retain written documentation of the inspections and any maintenance performed.
- Perform a pre-inspection of the activity area before the arrival of students. Document and report any hazards. Fix issues on the spot when appropriate.
- Develop reporting and repairing procedures with the maintenance department.
- Do not use areas that may be dangerous. Be prepared to cancel an activity or use an alternative location.
- Ensure your staff and student-athletes understand facility safety issues and how to identify and report them.
- Regularly ensure access to entrances, exits, and emergency equipment is clear and easily accessible.

Environmental Considerations

Coaches must be aware of the environmental risks associated with outdoor activities, such as temperature and weather. It is vital to stay alert to changing conditions during practice and competition and be prepared.

- **Excessive Heat** – Common health concerns in hot weather are dehydration, heat strokes, and heat exhaustion. These are considered medical emergencies and require immediate attention. When practicing or playing in hot weather:
 - Know and follow the [WIAA Heat Index Policy](#).
 - Have a current emergency action plan for obtaining emergency medical services if needed.
 - When the Heat Index meets or exceeds 70°F, provide a method for rapidly cooling athletes experiencing heat illness.
 - When the heat index is 95°F or higher, activity should be altered and/or eliminated using the WIAA Heat Index Policy.
 - Consider that, on average, it takes two weeks for athletes to acclimate to the heat.
 - Provide proper rest periods during and between practice sessions.

- Allow students unrestricted access to water and encourage frequent breaks for athletes to rehydrate. Designate a staff member or adult volunteer to ensure all students drink water.
 - Minimize the amount of equipment and clothing players wear in hot and humid conditions. Do not remove the equipment necessary for players' safety.
- **Excessive Cold** – Exposure to extreme cold may be an infrequent problem here in Washington, but it should be recognized. The human body's mechanisms for heat retention are significantly less efficient than our ability to dissipate heat. Even in seemingly benign environmental conditions, hypothermia and frostbite can occur. If unsure whether an athlete is hypothermic or suffering from frostbite, err on the side of caution and seek medical treatment. If your athletes must be out in cold or wet weather, ensure they:
 - Dress in layers.
 - Cover their head to prevent excessive heat loss from the head and neck.
 - Stay dry by wearing a wicking fabric next to the body and a breathable, water-repellent outer layer.
 - Remove wet clothing immediately and replace it with a dry alternative.
 - Stay adequately hydrated and nourished.
 - Limit time spent in the cold.
 - Take regular breaks to warm up.
- **Air Quality** – In recent years, air pollution has become a concern in Washington during the warmer months, mainly due to wildfires, which causes practices and competition to be modified and/or canceled. All children younger than 18 are considered a sensitive group. Youth are more susceptible to health effects from breathing in PM2.5 because they breathe in more air than adults for their body weight. Their respiratory system continues to develop until about age 21. The Department of Health has published a [Washington Children and Youth Activities Guide for Air Quality](#) recommending activity duration and intensity based on the Outside Air Quality Index.
- **Lightning** – Lightning may be the most frequently encountered severe storm hazard endangering physically active people each year. Millions of lightning flashes strike the ground annually in the United States, with three-quarters of all lightning casualties occurring between May and September and nearly four-fifths occurring between 10:00 am and 7:00 pm, which coincides with the hours for most athletic events. At the first sign of a potential storm, seek safe shelter.

To Provide Safe Equipment

Coaches have a duty to ensure appropriate and safe equipment.

The higher the risk of injury, the greater the need for protective equipment and following standardized guidelines. Coaches need to demonstrate that they select the most appropriate equipment for the activity. The most suitable equipment is not always the least expensive option. Good documentation and logical reasoning for equipment selection, usage, and replacement of worn equipment are vital to show due diligence in proper care and safety. This due diligence must also be applied to items purchased by others or donated to the district.

- Develop a complete list of what student-athletes will need to participate safely in each activity.
 - Share the list with guardians and students at the beginning of the season.
 - Review the list before practice and competition.
 - Emphasize the importance of proper wear and fit of all athletic gear and why they should never modify the equipment.
 - Routinely discuss with students what equipment they will need to provide for themselves.
- Implement daily and pre-game inspections of all equipment.
- Implement and enforce the rule of no practice or competition if the equipment is not in compliance.

Maintenance & Repair

Develop written policies/procedures that specify coaches will follow the manufacturer's recommendations and established equipment maintenance and repair standards. Develop processes to store and secure unusable equipment until it receives proper maintenance or is removed permanently from use.

- Schedule yearly reconditioning or replacement of equipment and keep records for documentation. In case of failure or injury, this documentation could help demonstrate that the district took adequate steps to ensure equipment safety.
- Make sure you track equipment assignment, reconditioning, repair requests, repair services, and removal from use.
- Helmets deemed unusable must be destroyed so they can never be placed in service again.

In sports that require helmet protection (football, baseball, softball, etc.), coaches must ensure all equipment meets the criteria set forth by either the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) or the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM). School athletic departments need to follow the current standards regarding helmet care and upkeep.

- Helmets require annual reconditioning and certification by a reputable company. The National Athletic Equipment Reconditioners Association (NAERA) and NOCSAE published an article on [Recertification and Recondition of Sports Equipment – Understanding the Process](#) to help coaches understand the reconditions standards. The [NAERA](#) maintains a list of NOCSAE-licensed reconditioners.
- Develop written procedures regarding student use of personally owned helmets.

Retaining relevant paperwork is essential. Maintain manufacturer and installer information, purchase orders, warranties, and other pertinent information in a central file for safe recordkeeping.

When working with a contractor for installation, request a signed statement that indicates the work was completed per the manufacturer's specifications.

Retain written documentation of all equipment inspections, maintenance, and parts replacement. Use only approved replacement parts that meet the manufacturer's requirements.

Hygiene

To prevent the spread of infectious diseases, the district must have documented protocols to ensure that the equipment and spaces used by athletes are cleaned and disinfected regularly.

- **Athletic gear** – The team's hygiene protocol should include athletic gear and equipment. Follow WIAA and manufacturer recommendations for cleaning and disinfection frequency.
- **Athletic Mats** – Maintain and repair athletic mats; repair rips or tears using the manufacturer's recommendation. Germs can migrate through openings in the mat cover to the foam padding beneath, potentially perpetuating hygiene problems. Several companies can professionally resurface or repair torn or cracked mats.
- **Wall Mats** – Check to ensure that wall mats are in good repair. Clean wall mats per manufacturer instructions. When temporarily or permanently removing a wall mat, consider if other temporary safety precautions need to be in place.

Donated Items

Develop a protocol that addresses equipment purchased or donated by outside groups. School booster clubs and local community organizations often wish to donate or give items to athletic teams. It is essential to ensure that gifts are:

- Compliant with current safety standards.
- Have a history of documented inspection and repairs if not brand-new.
- Appropriate and safe for student use.
- Able to be maintained and repaired.

Work with your business office to develop appropriate steps for accepting donations or gifts.

To Train and Instruct

Coaches have a duty to provide appropriate instruction.

Explain to students why they need to do certain things and show them how. Analyze and break skills into small steps appropriate for each athlete's cognitive ability. Be aware of students who may have learning disabilities and require extra help with verbal or written instructions.

Use a progressive format to teach skills. Teach basic steps, then proceed to the next level only when students demonstrate competence. Reviewing fundamentals at every level will increase an athlete's performance while reducing the likelihood of injuries. If you cannot physically perform the technique, it is imperative that someone on staff can show all the proper steps.

Safety should be a part of each lesson plan and practice session. Document in writing your plan for the day, what safety lessons/rules you reviewed with the team, and who was in attendance. If an injury occurs, you want to show that safety rules and proper playing techniques were taught, reinforced, and acknowledged by the player. Taking attendance is crucial. If a student misses practice, ensure they receive the missed lesson before progressing.

- Students have until they are 21 years old to file a claim. Documented practice plans and attendance logs can help verify student training years after a student has left the district.
- Administer verbal and written quizzes to demonstrate/document that students understand how to apply safety principles.
- Use safety charts and posters in locker rooms and other areas to reinforce the importance of safety.
- If an athlete is not performing a technique correctly, stop them immediately and re-train.
- Encourage athletes to ask questions if they are unsure.
- Cover and repeat the basics often.
- Establish with your team, their guardians, and your administration the consequences for athletes who repeatedly fail to follow the safety rules.
- Some students may also play on non-school teams. Remind students that if they did not learn a technique or maneuver in the school program, they should not use it at district practice or competition.

Correctly match players by size, weight, and experience. Remind coaches and volunteers that they must never scrimmage against players. Pairing a student with an adult is always a mismatch.

The "win at all costs" attitude is inappropriate for players, parents, and coaching staff. Fostering an atmosphere of healthy competition that emphasizes cooperation and a positive self-image rather than just winning truly makes your team number one.

Social Media Pages

We see increased interest in using social media to build team camaraderie or share student-athlete accomplishments. WSRMP recommends that all content owned by the school is shared and managed through approved school-operated social media accounts.

To Supervise

Coaches have a duty to provide proper supervision of students.

Negligent supervision is the most common allegation in claims against school districts and staff. Most of these incidents occur when a teacher or coach is away from an area, is momentarily distracted, or fails to see a situation developing that compromises student safety. In the court's eyes, if you cannot physically see the student, you are not supervising them. Supervision is just as necessary for the locker room as it is on the field.

Develop a written plan defining how you will handle specific supervision situations such as:

- Locker rooms
- Transportation
- Away games
- Unstructured or transition times
- Overnight accommodations

Some situations may require more adult supervision than others. Volunteers can be beneficial if adequately trained and supervised.

Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying

Athletics are an extension of the school day. The policies and procedures that apply during the day still apply during all athletic activities, whether on or off campus. Coaches are required to know and implement their district policies and reporting procedures regarding bullying, harassment, and hazing.

- Have all students, their guardians, volunteers, and coaching staff sign a contract before the start of the season outlining the rules of acceptable and unacceptable behavior and the consequences of any infractions.
- Post a copy of the behavior contract in the locker room.
- Provide in-service training for all staff and volunteers to address such issues.
- Post a list of behavior rules for spectators in a prominent place by stands or bleachers.

Coaches should implement an open-door policy. Being aware and alert can mean the difference between stopping a minor issue and dealing with a significant problem.

- Encourage students to report any HIB incidents promptly.
- Immediately intervene when you hear instances of ridicule, harassment, bullying, threats, extortion, or physical violence.
- Regularly remind district employees and volunteers that they are required to report all suspected abuse.

Districts must also be aware of the possibility of violence or danger during or after a game. The coach, athletic director, and school administration are responsible for having safety procedures and security patrol in place to monitor and diffuse any issues.

Volunteers

Coaches are responsible for supervising volunteers and chaperones and must be aware of the approval process and policies/procedures a district has adopted regarding volunteer management.

- Volunteers need to complete a screening and a formal background check.
- Volunteers should not be allowed unsupervised access to students.
- Volunteers must sign a release indicating they understand the school district cannot provide for their medical coverage and injuries.

Volunteers, like paid employees, must have a clear understanding of their duties and function. Accurate volunteer position descriptions and training are essential in creating a safe and enjoyable relationship. When the expectations are clearly defined, it is easier for all parties to benefit.

Clearly outline a volunteer's scope of duties. Work with your administration to create an athletics-specific volunteer training program. Depending on the length of service and duties, they may need to complete the same or similar training as the hired coaches.

To Provide Proper Discipline

Coaches have a duty to maintain control on and off the field.

Parents, players, and other school employees and volunteers need to understand who is in charge and responsible from the moment the athletes enter the locker room until they return to their guardian's care. Coaches are encouraged to wear attire that easily distinguishes them as a coach. Whistles help maintain authority but should not be overused.

Physical discipline or verbally abusive language is not acceptable. Always follow your district's pre-established discipline guidelines.

- Follow district policies and procedures regarding discipline and appropriate behavior. Students identified as having special needs may have different discipline requirements. Keep an updated copy of relevant policies in your coach's manual for easy reference.
- Provide consistent and proper discipline techniques. Prepare written guidelines establishing discipline for specific common infractions. Ensure all discipline is consistent with district policies and appropriate.
- Never belittle or demean a student. Be careful how you or others correct a student, especially in front of other players or spectators.
- Provide students and staff with proper instructions regarding types of appropriate discipline.
- Be consistent with discipline. Inconsistency can look like favoritism. Be conscious of perceived preferential treatment.

To Provide Safe Transportation

Coaches have a duty to ensure safe transportation.

The safest mode of transportation for students is a school bus. Transporting students in non-district-owned vehicles or allowing students to drive each other leaves coaches and districts open for liability. Work with your school administration to ensure you have policies addressing student transportation for athletic practices and events. Know how to handle last-minute student and guardian requests.

- All student-athletes who travel with a team to an away athletic event must return to the school with the team. The only exception to this policy is when the coach and parent/guardian agree that it is beneficial for the student-athlete to ride home with the parent/guardian.
 - Require guardians to sign an athletic transportation release form in advance of the event if their student will not be using district-provided transportation.
 - A student should not be left unsupervised by the district while waiting for their guardians.
- If the district is not providing transportation to events off-campus:
 - Notify participants and their guardians in writing that the district is not providing student transportation to the event and that guardians are responsible for coordinating their student's transportation.
 - Give specific directions to the destination and include when students must arrive and be picked up.
 - Remind staff and volunteers that it is the parent's sole responsibility to make transportation arrangements.
 - Never direct a student to transport other students.
- If using a van to transport students, ensure that it has a capacity of ten or fewer people, including the driver. When used to transport students, vehicles that hold more than ten passengers, including the driver, are classified as buses and must meet stringent bus regulations. This "ten-passenger rule" also applies to rental vans.

For additional transportation guidance, please email riskservices@wsrmp.com.

To Keep Athletes Safe and Healthy

Coaches have the duty to keep student-athletes safe and healthy.

Before a student begins sports practice, there are requirements to ensure they are ready and capable of participation.

- All student-athletes must have a physical exam in compliance with WIAA recommendation [17.11.0](#).
- History of previous illness and injuries, specifically head injuries, must be documented before beginning training activities or organized practice.

Coaches should know the physical condition of their athletes and plan practice schedules accordingly.

- Review physical demands required for the sport at a pre-season meeting and on the guardian permission form.
- Document in writing that you have informed the students and their parents of the importance of obtaining proper muscle strength, endurance, flexibility, and cardio-respiratory fitness before the start of any sports season.
- Group the activities according to skill level and size, not chronological age, particularly during contact sports. If this is not practical, modify the exercise to accommodate players with varying skill levels.

Coaches need to be aware of signs of eating disorders, specifically in sports with weight requirements. Be mindful of signs of steroid use. Never encourage players to use or try any products. Educate players and their guardians about the hazards of over-the-counter or illegal products such as bulking up powders, vitamin supplements, and steroids. Report all suspected eating disorders or steroid use cases immediately to the athletic director or school principal for further investigation. Work with your Human Resources department and school nurse to ensure you and your staff understand and comply with medical confidentiality rules.

Do not provide students with supplements, over-the-counter medication, or prescription medications unless you have documented authorization and training from your District and have followed the District procedure for medication at school.

Be aware that students with specific medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, and other chronic conditions, may require self-medication and additional care.

- Train staff to recognize signs and symptoms of pre-existing conditions and when a student may require intervention.
- Require parents to meet with their medical care provider and obtain clear written guidelines for the athlete's condition and the proper use of medication during practices, home games, and away from school activities. Retain a copy of this information.
- Have a plan for handling the need for self-medication or emergency medical help if self-administered treatment is not effective.
- Remember that student medical information is protected and shared only on a need-to-know basis.

To Provide Emergency Medical Care

Coaches have a duty to provide prompt appropriate emergency medical services to all injured athletes.

Athletic injuries may occur at any time and during any activity. Be prepared for the possibility of injuries by formulating an emergency plan, providing proper coverage of events, and maintaining appropriate emergency equipment and supplies. Give special consideration to injuries involving trauma to the neck, spinal cord, and growth plates. To help manage potential risks, develop, document, and implement a venue-specific Emergency Action Plan (EAP). To learn more about Emergency Athletic Plans, please visit the [WIAA - Health and Wellness](#) webpage, [National Athletic Trainers' Association](#) website, or email riskservices@wsrmp.com for additional resources.

- Develop Emergency Medical Plans for athletic event medical emergencies.
- Maintain adequate equipment to provide emergency medical care for home and off-property activities.
- Train staff on how to use all provided emergency medical equipment.
- Arrange professional medical help if required, including transport and emergency facilities.
- Obtain medical release authorizing students to be treated by emergency medical staff.
- Make sure parent/guardian emergency contact information is current.

Post-Injury Procedures

The priority and primary duty are to recognize and provide proper emergency medical intervention and care for an injured student.

- When in doubt, call 911.
- Do not move any student suspected of having sustained a head, spinal, internal injuries, or fractures.
- Immediately contact the parent or guardian.
- Contact the athletic director or designated school contact.
- Maintain confidentiality. Refer all media or public inquiries to your school district's designated public information officer.
- Have a member of the coaching staff ride in the ambulance or meet the ambulance at the Emergency Room.
- Secure any equipment involved in the injury.
- If it is a catastrophic injury, please immediately contact the WSRMP Claims Department.

Know your district's reporting procedures, and report all injuries and incidents at practice and games within 24 hours. Provide staff and volunteers with information regarding documenting injuries/incidents during games and practices. Please follow your district's reporting procedure and notify the WSRMP Claims Department of any of the following incidents:

- Student injuries other than minor scrapes or bruises.
- Student injuries involving 911, EMT, or outside medical assistance.
- Student injuries where the school or parent/guardian takes the student from school or a school event to a physician or hospital.
- Student injuries involving the head, neck, or back, other than minor scrapes or bruises.

- Injuries that involve an actual or perceived defect or maintenance concern with school equipment or facilities.
- Injuries that include electrical shock or burns from any source.
- Student injuries involving exposure, ingestion, or contact with chemicals.
- Student seizures, whether related to trauma or medical condition.
- All drug-related incidents, whether overdose or reaction from prescription drugs or illegal substances.
- Student incidents involving loss of consciousness. (Students suffering from a loss of consciousness should be examined by a physician.)
- Student incidents where a student goes into shock.
- Student injuries, other than minor scrapes or bruises, received when riding, entering, or exiting a school bus.
- Injuries or complaints involving significant privacy issues of students.

Head Injuries

HB 1824, known as the Zachery Lystedt Law ([RCW 28A.600.190](#)), took effect in 2009. This statute requires school districts and the WIAA to work together to develop guidelines to educate coaches, athletes, and their guardians regarding the nature and risk of concussions and head injuries. The law also mandates that any athlete suspected of sustaining a head injury or concussion be immediately removed from the event and receive written clearance to return to play from a licensed healthcare provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussions.

- **A concussion** is a traumatic brain injury that occurs when an outside force impacts the head hard enough to cause the brain to move within the skull or if the force causes the skull to break and directly hurts the brain. Rapid acceleration and deceleration of the head can force the brain to move back and forth across the inside of the skull. The stress from the movements pulls apart nerve fibers and causes damage to brain tissue.
- **Second Impact Syndrome (SIS):** Second Impact Syndrome is the most serious of all the risks associated with premature return to play. Suppose a player returns to competition before the symptoms of a first concussion have entirely cleared. Even a minor blow to the head or sudden head jerk can result in a loss of autoregulation of the brain's blood supply. The impact may cause blood vessel damage, blood clot formation, and brain swelling, putting pressure on the brain stem, which controls breathing. Breathing failure then causes the athlete to collapse. SIS can result in paralysis, mental disabilities, epilepsy, and death.

An athlete who is symptomatic from a head injury must not be allowed to participate in contact or collision activities until all cerebral symptoms have subsided.

- Always require a physician's release indicating the student can resume all athletic activities. Establish a detailed plan for head injuries and requirements before students return to practice or competition.
- Always comply with HB 1824 and its required dispensing of information, training, and documentation.
- Require all staff to become trained in identifying and assessing head injuries and emergency protocols as outlined by WIAA and HB1824.

- Teach athletes how to protect themselves against head injuries.
- Ensure all protective equipment fits properly and use as intended by the manufacturer.

Sports helmets primarily prevent catastrophic injuries like skull fractures and cannot prevent all concussions. A helmet that protects the head from a skull fracture does not adequately control the rotational and shearing forces that lead to many concussions. Although wearing a helmet will not prevent all head injuries, a poorly fitted helmet is limited in its protection. Coaches must play an active role in enforcing the proper fitting and use of the helmet.

Cardiac Arrest

Cardiac arrest is the leading cause of death in young athletes. The Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) Awareness Act was introduced in SB 5083 and enacted in 2015. [RCW 28A.600.195](#) required the WIAA, schools, a nonprofit organization that educates on sudden cardiac arrest in youth athletes, and UW medicine for sports cardiology to create an online pamphlet that includes information on the nature, risk, symptoms, and warning signs, prevention, and treatment of sudden cardiac arrest. They also were tasked with creating an online sudden cardiac arrest prevention program for coaches.

- Coaches shall complete an online sudden cardiac arrest prevention program every three years.
- Require that students and guardians sign a sudden cardiac arrest information sheet yearly. WIAA's Cardiac Awareness Pamphlet and Student/Parent Information Acknowledgment are [here](#).

Automated External Defibrillator (AED)

Schools with an AED onsite must train staff on properly using the equipment and maintain the AED per the manufacturer's standards. Familiarize your team with the requirements of [RCW 70.54.310](#).

- Identify who is responsible for personnel training, required documentation, AED placement, inspection, and maintenance.
- Place AEDs onsite if the collapse-to-shock time interval for conventional EMS is estimated to be greater than 5 minutes.
- If AEDs are installed or moved, notify EMS dispatch centers and first responding agencies of the type of equipment, its exact location on school grounds, and if staff are trained to use the equipment.
- Call 911, begin CPR, and use an AED as soon as possible.

Proper Documentation and Reporting

Coaches have a duty to document and record steps taken to keep student-athletes safe.

A district must ask itself, “Can we prove we are doing the right thing?” No matter how careful you are and how many safeguards you put in place, there will be incidents and accidents. If you document the steps you implemented to keep students and others safe, it is much easier to prove your due diligence.

Any time an injury may result in a claim, it is important to keep supporting documentation such as safety quizzes, handouts, and other materials with the injury report. Retain the documentation with the student’s file until they reach past the age of 21, as students may return up to age 21 to recover costs for losses. Work with your district administration to maintain the proper documentation.

Documentation may include:

- Completed guardian informed consent forms.
- A signed concussion and head injury information sheet.
- A signed sudden cardiac arrest information sheet.
- Physician-completed sports physical authorizing the student to participate in the activity/sport.
- Any district incident/injury reports.
- Post-injury return-to-play report(s) from a medical professional.
- Equipment and facility maintenance and inspection records.
- Training curriculum and attendance log showing a plan of skills progression and safety drills.
- Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) records.
- Venue-specific emergency plans.
- Coach and volunteer training records.

Mandatory Reporting

Per [RCW 26.44.030](#), as a school coach, you are considered a mandated reporter. This means that if you suspect a child has suffered abuse or neglect, you are legally obligated to report such suspicion or cause a report to be made to the proper law enforcement agency or child protective services at the first opportunity but no longer than 48 hours after you decide reasonable cause exists that an incident occurred. A child is anyone under the age of 18 or enrolled as a student of the district.

Reportable abuse includes:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual exploitation
- Negligent treatment or maltreatment
- Abandonment

Reportable abuse includes abuse caused by another student or minor. If you are in doubt about whether to report, it is better to make your concerns known. The agency you report to will decide whether further action is needed. Your district has a policy specific to its mandatory reporting process.

Important Policies and Procedures

Coaches have a duty to know and apply their school district's board policies and procedures.

Athletic programs are an extension of the school day, and the same rules, policies, and procedures apply. You likely read and acknowledged your district's version of WSSDA model policies and procedures at your time of hire. You are responsible for knowing and implementing these policies. Consider re-reading these policies regularly and keeping copies on hand in the event you need to reference them. Your school may identify additional policies for your detailed review. If you have questions about your school district policies or procedures, contact your department director or school administration for assistance.

Model WSSDA Policies

- 2023 Digital Citizenship & Media Literacy
- 2151 Interscholastic Activities
- 2320 Field Trips and Excursions
- 3205 Sexual Harassment of Students Prohibited
- 3207 Prohibition of Harassment, Intimidation, or Bullying
- 3211 Gender-Inclusive Schools: Transgender and Gender Expansive Student Rights and Supports
- 3240 Student Behavior and Disciplinary Responses
- 3241 Student Discipline
- 3412 Automated External Defibrillators
- 3413 Student Immunization and Life-Threatening Health Conditions
- 3414 Infection Diseases
- 3416 Medication at School
- 3418 Response to Student Injury or Illness
- 3421 Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation Prevention
- 3422 Student Sports- Concussion, Head Injuries and Sudden Cardiac Arrest
- 4020 Confidential Communications
- 5253 Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries
- 5630 Volunteers

POLICY SPOTLIGHT: 5253 Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries

Athletic coaching has unique exposures. Coaches spend most of the time with students outside the

traditional classroom setting, likely spending much time with students between practice and competition and are more likely to find themselves in situations where they are alone with a student or feel they need to communicate with a student one-on-one. Many athletes may view you as a role model and mentor. Familiarize yourself with your district's Maintaining Professional Staff/ Student Boundary board policy. Following this policy helps keep you, other staff, and your student-athletes safe and helps avoid the perception of misconduct.

A boundary invasion is an act or pattern of behavior by a staff member or volunteer that does not have a bone fide health, safety, or educational purpose for the student.

Examples of boundary invasion include:

- Touching children when there is no educational or medical reason.
- Flirting with students.
- Having personal secrets with a student.
- A staff member making comments about a student's body.
- Telling sexual jokes or innuendos to students.
- Giving gifts or money to the student.
- Having a "special" relationship with a particular student.
- Being alone with a student behind closed doors at school.
- Giving students rides alone in a non-emergency situation.
- Visiting the student's home without supervisor's approval.
- Inviting individual students to the coach's home.

Many boundary invasions are well-intended but are still not appropriate.

- Inappropriate physical contact: hugging, hair petting, etc.
- Singling out a student.
- Encouraging a student to talk about personal problems.
- Electronic contact: texting, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.
- Giving gifts, cards, etc.
- Contacting students outside school using non-school-approved communication means or regarding non-school-related matters.
- Engaging with students as though they are peers.

To help avoid perceptions of misconduct, please consider the following:

- Communicate using only district-provided or approved email accounts or mobile applications.
- Avoid one-on-one electronic communication with a student. Include a parent or other school employee if one-on-one contact is necessary.
- Do not add students to your private social media.
- Stay visible if you are alone with a student.
- Work within your job description. If a student comes to you asking for support, communicate this with your administration to help the student find the correct contact and supports.
- Plan ahead of time how you will handle situations where a student is not picked up after an activity.
- Notify your administration if you have a pre-existing relationship with a student, such as your child is friends with them, or you are a family member.

Additional WSRMP Resources

Below are some of the additional WSRMP resources available to WSRMP Members on the [WSRMP Members Website](#). WSRMP members may also email riskservices@wsrmp.com to request a resource.

- SAMPLE WIAA Sport Informed Consent Forms (English & Spanish)
 - Baseball/ Softball
 - Basketball
 - Bowling
 - Cheer
 - Cross-country
 - Football
 - Golf
 - Gymnastics
 - Soccer
 - Swimming & Diving
 - Tennis
 - Track & Field
 - Volleyball
 - Weightlifting
 - Wrestling
- Athletic Camp Guidelines
- Athletic Camp Matrix
- Athletic Emergency Action Plans
- Athletic Equipment Sample Loan Form
- Athletic Hygiene Guidelines
- Athletic Liability Exposures
- Bleacher Inspection Checklist
- Catastrophic Athletic Injuries
- Club Sport Activity Guidelines
- Cross Country Guidelines
- District Transportation Guidelines
- Flag Football
- Maintaining Athletic Fields
- Sample Alternate Transportation Form
- School Volunteers
- Weight Room Safety
- White Paper – Recommendation for Football Helmets (2016)
- White Paper – Supervision & Liability for School-Sponsored Events
- Winter Sports Programs