

Preventing Prescription Opioid Misuse Among Student Athletes

Massachusetts is in the midst of an opioid crisis. Athletes in particular, due to their risk of injury and the resulting pain, may be at risk of misusing prescription opioids.

Playing a sport and being on a team benefits middle and high school athletes in many ways—including through social connections, structured afterschool time, and physical fitness—however, it can also lead to injury. In rare cases, sports injuries may result in pain that is severe or long-lasting enough to involve a prescription painkiller.

If a student athlete is injured, whenever possible, treat the injury first with rest, ice, compression, and elevation—but do seek medical care if it's necessary. Opioids for pain should be considered only by a physician and only when other treatment methods have not provided relief.

Parents, coaches, athletic directors, athletic trainers, and school nurses involved in 6th–12th grade extracurricular sports have been required to complete an annual training on the risks of concussion and head injury.

Opioid-related legislation (an act related to substance use, treatment, education and prevention) has added a requirement that the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS) provide educational materials on the dangers of opioid use and misuse to those persons participating in the annual head injury safety program. The educational materials must also be distributed in written form to all students participating in an extracurricular athletic activity prior to the commencement of their athletic seasons.

MOST IMPORTANT:

An injured athlete needs time to heal. Missing a game or two is better than missing an entire season—or more.



(See also mass.gov/dph/resourcesforyouth/opioidmisuse.)

After an injury, it is important to have a communication and a return-to-play plan in place. (Look at the format and wording of your school's concussion protocols for guidance.) Too often, athletes do not allow sufficient time to recover from their injuries and turn to pain medication to enable their continued participation in their sport. Care must be taken to avoid the common cycle of injury, pain, and re-injury.

In addition, keep in mind the mental and social components of being on a school team and how this may impact the athlete's recovery and behavior. Losing the social connection to the team can be as damaging in some ways as the physical injury. As appropriate, continue to include the student in team practices, games, and social events.

The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) provides workshops and training programs for school administrators, educators, teacher-coaches, and student athletes. The MIAA Partners in Prevention is a consortium of more than 60 health, wellness, and safety organizations working together to provide resources and programming to schools and communities. The MIAA Sports Medicine Committee, which includes athletic directors, physicians, school nurses, administrators, and coaches, strives to ensure the safety of our students. The MIAA Youth Substance Misuse Prevention Collaborative is a committee of key Commonwealth stakeholders who provide prevention programming and resources. For information about MIAA initiatives and programming, call **1-508-541-7997** or visit www.miaa.net.

The MIAA is the Massachusetts Alliance Partner for the Partnership for Drug Free Kids. Learn more about the Partnership at www.drug-free.org/.



For more information and resources on preventing substance misuse:

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse offers free health education resources from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. mass.gov/MAClearinghouse

Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline provides free and anonymous information and referrals for alcohol and other substance use problems. HelplineMA.org | Toll-free: 1-800-327-5050 | TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-720-3480

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Addiction Services oversees treatment for substance use disorders in the Commonwealth. mass.gov/dph/bsas

National Institute for Drug Abuse (part of the National Institutes of Health) is charged with advancing the science of addiction, and provides the latest research and resources. www.drugabuse.gov
