

Sports Injuries and Failure to Treat

Every sports program runs the risk of athletic injuries. Most common are minor muscle strains or extremity fractures, but more serious injuries can occur. Improvements in safety equipment, training practices, and warm-up procedures have somewhat reduced the frequency and severity of injuries, but this is often mitigated by athletes who are bigger, pushing the competitive envelope harder, and dealing with prior injuries.

One significant problem for coaches is identifying when an athlete needs to be taken to a hospital or seen by a doctor. Is that ankle injury a sprain or a fracture? Is the athlete who is having trouble breathing hyperventilated or suffering from asthma or having a heart attack? Delaying medical care can mean a significant financial loss to your school if a lawsuit results.

Coaches should adhere to this golden rule: If a delay in treatment might make the injury worse, seek immediate medical attention. Also, if the injury is “unstable” (athlete unable to bear weight on the injury) or compromises circulation, seek immediate medical attention. The last message that a school ever wants to communicate to a parent is, “we did not care enough about your child to seek medical care,” so it’s always better to err on the side of caution.