

<http://collegiatewaterpolo.org/officiating/referee-education/ncaarulesinterpretations/>

Rule 5-4: Is the use of soft headgear permitted for concussion prevention if the appropriate release form (Appendix F) is completed? (1/22/13)

The statement below is from the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports on the subject of helmets/soft headgear. Soft headgear includes concussion headbands/devices. Based on this statement from the NCAA, the use of helmets/soft headgear for concussion prevention is not permissible, and waivers may not be granted for this purpose.

All equipment worn by an athlete must comply with the applicable rule. This includes Rule 4 (Caps) and Rule 5-4 (Apparel—items likely to cause injury). Any item worn underneath the water polo cap must be in compliance with Rule 4 and as such would not be considered an item likely to cause injury. Exceptions to Rule 5-4 may be granted but a completed release form (Appendix F) must be available for presentation to the referees prior to any game in which the athlete wishes to participate. As stated above, the use of helmets/soft headgear (worn outside the hat) for concussion prevention is not permissible, and waivers may not be granted for this purpose. The NCAA will continue to monitor developments in this area and will consider adjustments to its position should valid scientific evidence arise.

Soft Headgear in Non-Helmeted Sports.

The NCAA does not view the use of soft headgear products as equipment for the prevention of concussion in non-helmeted sports. As explained below, soft headgear products may be worn in non-helmeted sports whose rules allow for such optional equipment, but the purpose of that equipment should be for reasons other than concussion prevention. In non-helmeted sports requiring a medical waiver for the use of such optional equipment, use of soft headgear as a condition to be medically cleared to play sports is ineffective. Therefore, the NCAA will not provide medical waivers for the use of soft headgear for the prevention of concussion in order to be medically cleared to play sports. It should be noted that there is no helmet which can prevent a concussion. There continues to be a need for valid scientific evidence that the use of such products decreases the incidence of concussion.

Concussion is a brain injury. It is important to note that there is a lack of clinical evidence supporting the value of the soft or padded headgear in the prevention of sports-related concussions. The NCAA recommends caution in utilizing these devices to permit medical clearance of a student-athlete if they would otherwise not be medically cleared to participate in their sport. Currently, wearing such headgear is not medically necessary to prevent concussions in order to play; however, this equipment may be used to cover lacerations and sutures as they are deemed appropriate within the *sport's* playing rules.

Current design and recommended use of these devices fail to address the proposed mechanism of concussive injury, that being rotational acceleration and deceleration forces acting on the brain. Institutions should refer to equipment standards from NOCSAE, ASTM, HECC, and CPSC when considering protective equipment for student-athletes and ensure the equipment is used for mitigating the risk of injuries for which they are designed.

When considering the use of this optional equipment during practice or permitted competition, athletes and coaches should take the time to read the qualifying statements provided with such a product addressing its limitations, particularly to prevent serious head injuries. Wearing such a device may provide a false sense of security in the area of concussion protection by the player, their coaches and their parents. In addition, placing headgear on a student-athlete may indirectly justify striking them in the head by opponents,

especially in sports where this has never been the intent (e.g., soccer, basketball, *women's* lacrosse, etc).

Moreover, a false sense of security in the area of concussion protection increases the likelihood that players, coaches, and parents will consider the medical condition to be adequately addressed and may place less importance upon avoiding head impact, reporting concussion symptoms, and returning to play prior to full recovery following a concussion.

The NCAA will continue to monitor developments in this area and will consider adjustments to its position should valid scientific evidence arise.

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<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/media-center/news/padded-caps-prohibited-men's-and-women's-water-polo>

## Padded caps prohibited in men's and women's water polo

The NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel approved new water polo rules that touch on swim caps, officiating and timeouts

March 10, 2014 11:47amGreg Johnson

The NCAA Playing Rules Oversight Panel approved a rule in men's and women's water polo Thursday regarding swim caps for players. The new rule stipulates that, beginning in the fall, water polo players can wear only swim caps beneath their water polo caps.

The rule, recommended by the NCAA Men's and Women's Water Polo Subcommittee, prohibits the use of padded caps, which are becoming more popular among water polo players concerned about concussions.

The committee based its decision on the fact that, according to the NCAA Sports Science Institute, no scientific evidence supports the notion that padded headgear helps prevent concussions.

[https://www.nfhs.org/media/1018445/nfhs\\_position\\_statement\\_soft\\_headgear\\_april\\_2017.pdf](https://www.nfhs.org/media/1018445/nfhs_position_statement_soft_headgear_april_2017.pdf)

# SOFT HEADGEAR IN NON-HELMETED SPORTS POSITION STATEMENT

## National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)

There is currently no consistent medical evidence to support the use of soft headgear products to prevent concussion. Their design and recommended uses do not address the suspected mechanisms of concussive injury: acceleration, deceleration and rotational forces acting upon the brain. The permissive use of soft headgear in some non-helmeted sports is allowed, but the intent of the usage should not be concussion prevention.

The use of soft headgear may produce unintended consequences, including providing a false sense of security to athletes, potentially leading to more aggressive play, thus increasing injury risk. A false sense of security may also result in athletes, coaches and parents/guardians placing less emphasis upon avoidance of head impact and foul play, concussion education and the immediate reporting of concussion symptoms.

The NFHS SMAC is aware of reports of athletes with a history of concussions being returned to play contact sports wearing soft headgear in an attempt to lessen further concussion risk. The NFHS SMAC strongly advises against using soft headgear as a justification to permit medical clearance of an athlete who would otherwise not be medically cleared to participate in a contact sport. However, soft headgear may be used to cover soft tissue injuries (such as lacerations and sutures) if deemed appropriate within the sport's playing rules.

When considering the use of soft headgear in non-helmeted sports, athletes, parents/guardians and coaches should read the manufacturers' instructions that address specific limitations in preventing injuries to the head and brain. Additionally, they should read the warning labels and should monitor that the equipment is being used as intended.

Valid scientific research should be pursued to more definitively determine the ability of soft headgear to decrease the incidence of concussion. The NFHS SMAC will continue to monitor research and will consider revision of this position statement should significant evidence arise.

In summary, protective headgear is required by NFHS rules in some sports and is permissive in others. Hard helmets can decrease the incidence of certain head trauma, such as skull fractures and subdural hematomas. Soft headgear may protect against cuts and bruises to the scalp and

1

forehead. Coaches, athletes and parents/guardians should review the manufacturers' warnings about proper usage and performance limits of such products. **No helmet or headgear can**

**prevent athletes from suffering concussions, and all sports should be played, coached and officiated in recognition of that fact.**

**Revised and Approved April 2017 June 2013**

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