Heads Up on Brain Injury

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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HEADS UP ON BRAIN INJURY

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The chief function of the body is to carry the brain around.

This quote by Thomas A. Edison illustrates the importance of the brain. The human brain deserves to be protected, defended and nourished, and yet people seem to disregard and even defy the importance of the brain.

Adults demonstrate this by allowing themselves and their children to ride a bike, skateboard, ski, or play contact sports without wearing a helmet. Parents often support their child in going back into the game too soon after receiving a concussion because of the importance that is put on “winning the game” or being “tough” or “being a man.”

We all need to become more aware of the serious effects a blow to the head can have and how to prevent brain injuries from occurring in the first place.

The Utah Legislature took a step toward protecting young brains earlier this month when the Protection of Athletes with Head Injuries bill passed the Utah Legislature. This bill requires amateur sports organizations to have a head injury policy and to remove a child from play if a head injury is suspected. It also requires medical clearance before the child returns to the playing field or court.

This year, in recognition of March Brain Injury Awareness Month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is encouraging school professionals, coaches, parents, and athletes to learn the steps they can take to reduce the risk for concussion among youth participating in sports.

An estimated 1.7 million traumatic brain injury (TBI)–related deaths, hospitalizations, and emergency department visits are expected to occur in the United States each year. Moreover, an estimated 135,000 sports and recreation-related TBIs, including concussions, are treated in U.S. emergency departments each year.

What is a concussion? A concussion is a type of TBI caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist inside the skull, stretching and damaging the brain cells and creating chemical changes in the brain.

Why is a concussion so dangerous? Many young athletes accept the risk for injury as one of the many challenges of participating in sports. Others might be unaware that even a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious. Although most athletes with a concussion recover quickly and fully, some will have symptoms that last for days, or even weeks. The effects of a more serious concussion can last for months or longer. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first (usually within a short period) can be very dangerous and can slow recovery or increase the chances for long-term problems. A repeat concussion can even be fatal.

The Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA) along with the Brain Injury Association of Utah (BIAU) and its network of more than 40 chartered state affiliates have joined forces to bring national and local attention to the fact that a concussion is a brain injury. Visit the TBI Awareness section of the BIAA website for 2011 awareness materials as well as additional facts about brain injury.

The CDC web site offers many resources about preventing, recognizing, and responding to brain injuries of all kinds, including sports-related concussions.

The lives of children and adults with brain injury are forever changed. They are often misunderstood, misdiagnosed and are left to deal with their new reality in isolation. There is much we can do to protect our brain and promote brain injury awareness.

The CPD is actively involved in providing resources and training about TBI through its Utah Traumatic Brain Injury Implementation Partnership Grant.