



Sport Collision Injury Collective

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9th November, 2015

Rt Hon Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for Education
Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt, Secretary of State for Health
Professor Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales
Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England
Tam Baillie, Children's Commissioner for Scotland
Koulla Woasouma, Children's Commissioner for Ireland
Dame Sally Davis, Chief Medical Officer for England
Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer for Ireland
Dr Ruth Hussey, Chief Medical Officer for Wales
Sir Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland

Open Letter: Prevent Concussion, Remove Tackling

We write to express our concern with the current practice of tackling, and other forms of harmful collision (such as in the ruck, maul and scrum), in youth rugby. Contact rugby is routinely delivered in schools in the United Kingdom, which is resulting in unnecessary and avoidable injuries.

A significant body of research highlights that rugby causes neurological damage, as well as short-term, life-long, and life-ending brain trauma (see: *Tackling Rugby. What Every Parent Should know about Injuries* by Professor Allyson Pollock).

Researchers at the University of Bath's Community Rugby Injury Surveillance Project show that one in four of all injuries in rugby union are traumatic brain injuries, which is still underreported. The Rugby Football Union show that 72 percent of traumatic brain injuries in contact rugby occur in the tackle phase of the sport. Two-thirds of all concussions occur during the tackle. With one head injury or concussion per match in the community game, and concussion common in the children's game, traumatic and repetitive brain injury is a routine occurrence. Thus, the evidence is clear: tackling in rugby is detrimental to health.

At present, initiatives are simply reactive, focusing solely upon how to manage existing brain trauma through concussion recognition, rather than proactively preventing traumatic brain injury and other injuries.

Many secondary schools in the United Kingdom deliver contact rugby as a compulsory part of the physical education curriculum from age eleven. And the UK government has selected rugby union and rugby league as two of the five target sports for increasing engagement up to 2017. This is exposing children to serious risk of injury during physical education activities in school. We therefore ask you to write to the Department of Education and Department of Health to ban the collision elements of the game so that school children play touch, and non-contact, rugby within British school systems.

Professor Eric Anderson

Professor of Sport, Masculinities and Sexualities
University of Winchester

Professor Allyson Pollock

Professor of Public Health
Queen Mary's, University of London