

*The NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports developed the following position statement at its December 2013 meeting regarding soft headgear products in non-helmeted sports to address misperceptions regarding their performance in preventing concussions among student-athletes:*

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 that 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 the 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 using 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 the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE), American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM), the Hockey Equipment Certification Council, Inc. (HECC), and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (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 (for example, soccer, basketball, women's lacrosse).

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.