



NFHS SMAC Update Regarding the NATA Document on the Care of the Spine Injured Athlete

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As many of you are aware, on June 24, 2015 the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) issued a document entitled "Appropriate Care of the Spine Injured Athlete." We applaud the NATA for addressing this critical issue, and working to update the original consensus statement from 1998. At the NFHS Annual Summer Meeting, which was held during the week following the NATA document release, Bob Colgate and I included the highlights of the NATA document in my NFHS Sports Medicine Forum talk. Subsequently, the NATA announced that the document had not been fully vetted by all participating organizations, and the NATA has now issued a proposed revision that changes Recommendation 4.

I still feel the overall directions and positions taken by the NATA document are correct and represent a "best practices" approach to the care of the spine injured athlete. I also support the proposed revision of the language in Recommendation 4 of the NATA document which adds "when appropriate, protective equipment may be removed prior to transport." It is critical that when and if they are on site, the team physician, athletic trainer and all members of the medical staff and EMS use their best clinical judgment to decide if helmet and shoulder pad removal should be performed on the field of play or within an emergency department. That being said, it is not realistic for all high schools across the country to be held to the same standards of staffing and personnel as professional teams or NCAA Division I universities. At many high school games, there are not enough trained personnel to safely remove equipment on the field. Therefore, in line with the proposed revision from the NATA, the responsible persons should use their best judgment and proceed accordingly.

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