

## What Parents Need to Know about Concussions

March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, a good time to make sure parents have the knowledge they need about a relatively common kind of brain injury in children – concussion. Although a concussion is relatively minor compared to more serious head injury, the longterm consequences are not always minor, especially in the case of repeated concussions.

### I. What is a concussion & how do you know if your child might have experienced one?

- Concussion is caused by a diffuse impact, with the brain moving within the skull, causing neurons to tear. There may be no visible wounds such as cuts or bruises.
- Signs of a likely concussion include being unconscious, even briefly; having altered consciousness (e.g., not knowing where you are or what day it is); experiencing nausea or vomiting, dizziness or visual disturbance; exhibiting changes in sensitivity to light, sound or smell; changes in mood or personality.

### II. What are the most common causes of concussions in children?

- Falling (e.g. down the stairs, out of a tree, off of a bike or skateboard, on the ice)
- Contact sports, with football, boys hockey and girls hockey having particularly high rates

### III. How well do children usually recover from a concussion?

- Most recover fully, although it may take weeks or months for the brain to heal completely.
- If a child has a second concussion within a few months after the first, the risk of longterm effects increases significantly. “Second impact syndrome” is dangerous; children are especially vulnerable to this.

### IV. If you suspect your child has had a concussion, what should you do?

- **See a pediatrician right away** – To get a diagnosis and recommendations for recovery
- **Get a referral to a neuropsychologist, if indicated** – For a more specific assessment and treatment
- **Help your child strike a balance of rest and engagement** – Adequate sleep, quiet time and reducing screen time can help, but it also is important to stay connected to friends, school and activities that exercise the brain without undue pressure
- **Prevent a second injury** – Do not return too quickly to sport or other vigorous activity; give the brain time to heal and wait until assessments show full recovery of function