

July 28, 2008

TO: Member School Principals and Athletic Administrators

FR: Daniel B. Ross, OHSAA Commissioner

RE: Football Practice/Contest Excess Heat Precautions

With most of you beginning football practice on Friday, the regular season not too far away and with temperatures and the heat index a concern during this time of the year, we wanted to reinforce some regulations and remind you to take precautions. Many of these same precautions can be applied to other sports.

PRACTICES

- Five days of acclimatization are required of all football players. Acclimatization simply means getting used to (acclimated) to the temperature and humidity during physical activity. During the first two days of coaching (July 31 and August 1) and practice, players may wear shirts, shorts, helmets and shoes. Pads are prohibited as well as contact drills. On the third and fourth practice days, shoulder pads may also be worn (August 2 and 4). Sunday, August 3, is a mandatory DAY OFF. Full pads may be worn on August 5, but contact continues to be prohibited. Contact may occur on August 6.
- Practice sessions should be revised when conditions (heat index) warrant. High heat and humidity should alert coaches to health concerns of their athletes. When the temperature/humidity factor (commonly referred to as the heat index) is elevated, revision in practices shall occur. Revisions could include: shortening practice sessions; holding practices in the morning or evening; altering the amount of equipment worn; reducing the intensity of practice sessions.
- 7th & 8th grade teams may begin practice on July 31 and follow the same schedule as the high school. Whenever 7th & 8th grade teams begin, they must follow an acclimatization at least as vigorous as the high school. 7th & 8th grade teams are permitted one scrimmage after completing 10 days of practice. The first 7th & 8th grade games may be held after 15 days of practice.
- Athletes should be educated on hydration techniques. They should drink 17-to-20 ounces of water or sports drink 2-to-3 hours before exercise and an additional 17-to-20 ounces 10-to-20 minutes prior to exercise.
- During practice, athletes should be allowed unrestricted fluid replacement. A general guide is to drink 7-to-10 ounces of water/sports drink every 15 minutes. Water must be available during practice.
- After practices, athletes should drink 20-to-24 ounces of water/sports drink for each pound of weight lost, and the rehydration should occur within two hours of the completion of practice.
- Every player shall weigh in before and after each summer practice session. The OHSAA provides weight charts for this purpose. A trainer, manager or other responsible person should be designated to oversee the weigh-ins.
- During two-a-days, athletes should gain back at least 90 percent of the weight lost in the first practice before being allowed to participate in the second practice.

- Weight monitoring must begin with the first practice and may be discontinued when two-a-day practice sessions end and the regular season begins.

CONTESTS

- Again, stress to participants the importance of properly hydrating themselves during the days leading up to the contest, and also to drink 8-to-12 ounces of water or sport drinks 20 minutes prior to the contest. This can go a long way toward preventing problems come game time.
- Schools should have unlimited amounts of water and sport drinks on hand during the contest, and coaches should be prepared to play a lot of players rather than just the starters.
- Consider starting your contests one-half to one hour later than normal when the temperature will likely cool down.
- Contest officials are permitted to establish predetermined breaks during a contest, such as halfway through each period. At that time players can drink water and remove their equipment, which should also take place at halftime (the more skin that is exposed, the more cooling that can take place).
- National Federation of State High School Associations playing rules allow the referee to shorten periods per mutual agreement by the opposing coaches. In addition, by mutual agreement a game may be terminated at any time.
- Contest managers are advised to monitor conditions for others affiliated with the contest, like cheerleaders, band members, coaches, officials and especially spectators.
- If schools decide NOT to play a contest, it becomes an open date for both. If one school desires to play but the other does not, there are no forfeits involved. Again, it would become an open date for both schools. However, schools do have the option to reschedule contests, and OHSAA regulations do permit schools to play more than one contest per week. There also are no OHSAA regulations that prohibit games from being played on Sundays.
- Please review the OHSAA policy on inclement weather and lightning. In short, upon the first indication that thunderstorm development is within 15 miles of the game site, the activity shall be suspended until 30 minutes after the storm has left this 15-mile zone. Individuals should move to a safe area until the storm has moved away.