ARC 9618C

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT[641]

Adopted and Filed

Rulemaking related to concussion or other brain injury return-to-play protocol

The Department of Health and Human Services hereby rescinds Chapter 54, "Concussion or Other Brain Injury Return-to-Play Protocol," Iowa Administrative Code, and adopts a new Chapter 54 with the same title.

Legal Authority for Rulemaking

This rulemaking is adopted under the authority provided in Iowa Code section 280.13C.

State or Federal Law Implemented

This rulemaking implements, in whole or in part, Iowa Code section 280.13C.

Purpose and Summary

This chapter describes the return-to-play protocol for a concussion or other brain injury adopted by the board of directors of each school district and the authorities in charge of each accredited nonpublic school with enrolled students who participate in an extracurricular interscholastic activity in grades 7 through 12. Concussions are a type of brain injury that can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. Concussions can occur in an organized or unorganized sport or recreational activity and can result from a fall or from players colliding with each other, with the ground, or with obstacles. Concussions can occur with or without loss of consciousness, but the vast majority of concussions occur without loss of consciousness.

The chapter underwent a Red Tape Review pursuant to Executive Order 10. As a result, the Department updated definitions to refer to the appropriate Iowa Code section and eliminated redundant language.

Public Comment and Changes to Rulemaking

Notice of Intended Action for this rulemaking was published in the Iowa Administrative Bulletin on August 20, 2025, as **ARC 9490C**. Public hearings were held on the following date:

- September 9, 2025

No one attended the public hearings. The Department did receive feedback from the Iowa Sports Medicine Advisory Committee, which provides guidance on sports safety policies and protocols in the State to the Iowa High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) and the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union (IGHSAU).

As a result of discussions with the Committee, changes from the Notice have been made to rework the rules to be more high-level, with detailed guidance to come from the IHSAA and IGHSAU. In doing so, updates will be easier to make as protocol changes. As a matter of practice, schools look first to the IHSAA and IGHSAU for information and guidance.

Adoption of Rulemaking

This rulemaking was adopted by the Department on September 24, 2025.

Fiscal Impact

This rulemaking has no fiscal impact to the State of Iowa.

Jobs Impact

After analysis and review of this rulemaking, no impact on jobs has been found.

Waivers

Any person who believes that the application of the discretionary provisions of this rulemaking would result in hardship or injustice to that person may petition the Department for a waiver of the discretionary provisions, if any, pursuant to 441—Chapter 6.

Review by Administrative Rules Review Committee

The Administrative Rules Review Committee, a bipartisan legislative committee which oversees rulemaking by executive branch agencies, may, on its own motion or on written request by any individual or group, review this rulemaking at its regular monthly meeting or at a special meeting. The Committee's meetings are open to the public, and interested persons may be heard as provided in Iowa Code section 17A.8(6).

Effective Date

This rulemaking will become effective on December 1, 2025.

The following rulemaking action is adopted:

ITEM 1. Rescind 641—Chapter 54 and adopt the following **new** chapter in lieu thereof:

CHAPTER 54
CONCUSSION OR OTHER BRAIN INJURY RETURN-TO-PLAY PROTOCOL

641—54.1(280) Definitions. For the purpose of these rules, the following definitions apply:

"Asymptomatic" means the student is no longer showing signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion or other brain injury.

"Contest" means the same as defined in Iowa Code section 280.13C(2).

"Extracurricular interscholastic activity" means the same as defined in Iowa Code section 280.13C(2).

"Licensed health care provider" means the same as defined in Iowa Code section 280.13C(2).

"Medical clearance" means written clearance from a licensed health care provider releasing the student following a concussion or other brain injury to return to or commence participation in any extracurricular interscholastic activity.

"Rest" means a recovery state at which physical and cognitive activities are reduced or removed with the intent to eliminate the signs, symptoms, or behaviors of brain injury.

"Return-to-learn plan" means the plan developed by personnel of a school district or accredited nonpublic school based on guidance developed as required under Iowa Code section 280.13C(6)*"b"* to provide adjustments or accommodations as the student returns to the classroom.

"Return-to-play" means the gradual, step-wise approach to returning a student to participation in any extracurricular interscholastic activity following a concussion or other brain injury.

641—54.2(280) Return-to-play protocol. The return-to-play protocol will be developed by the Iowa high school athletic association and Iowa girls high school athletic union and be disseminated to Iowa public schools and accredited nonpublic schools. The protocol will be based on current evidence-based practice and will include the following process:

54.2(1) *Return-to-play process.*

a. No student will return to contest or practice the same day as a suspected concussion or other brain injury.

b. A student suspected of having a concussion will be evaluated by a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussion and other brain injuries as soon as feasible.

c. A student who has been removed from participation will receive written medical clearance prior to starting the return-to-play protocol.

d. The return-to-play steps shall be conducted under the guidance of a licensed health care provider following current best practice and as set forth by the Iowa high school athletic association and Iowa girls high school athletic union, with provision for delayed return-to-play steps as necessary.

e. Return-to-play may begin when the student is still symptomatic, after a brief period of rest.

f. No contact- or collision-related activities will be performed as part of the return-to-play steps until the student has written medical clearance from a licensed health care provider and has returned to pre-injury academic function.

54.2(2) Reserved.

These rules are intended to implement Iowa Code section 280.13C.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For replacement pages for IAC, see IAC Supplement 10/15/25.