Preventing Prescription Opioid Misuse Among Student Athletes

Massachusetts is in the midst of an opioid epidemic. Athletes in particular, due to their risk of injury and the resulting pain, may be at risk for misusing prescription opioids.

While playing a sport and being on a team benefits middle and high school athletes in many ways—including social connections, structured afterschool time, and physical fitness—it can also lead to injury. In rare cases, sports injuries may result in pain that is severe or long-lasting enough to require a prescription painkiller.

If a student athlete is injured, whenever possible, treat the injury first with rest, ice, compression, elevation, and anti-inflammatory medication—but do seek medical care if it's necessary. Opioids for pain should be considered only by a physician and only when other approaches have not provided relief.

For the last four years, parents, coaches, athletic directors, athletic trainers, and school nurses involved in 6th–12th grade extracurricular sports have been required to complete an annual training on risks of concussion and head injury. New opioid legislation (An act relative to substance use, treatment, education and prevention) has added a requirement that BSAS provide educational materials on the dangers of opioid use and misuse to those persons participating in the annual head injury safety program. The educational materials shall also be distributed in written form to all students participating in an extracurricular athletic activity prior to the commencement of their athletic seasons (see also www.mass.gov/dph/resourcesforyouthopioidmisuse)

MOST IMPORTANT:

An injured athlete needs time to heal.

Missing a game or two is better than missing an entire season—or more.

After an injury, it is important to have a communications and a return-to-play plan put in place. (Look at the format and wording of your school's concussion protocols for guidance.) Too often, athletes do not allow sufficient time to recover from their injuries and turn to pain medication to enable their continued participation in their sport. Care must be taken to avoid the common cycle of injury, pain, and re-injury.

In addition, keep in mind the mental and social components of being on a school team and how this may impact the athlete's recovery and behavior. Losing the social connection to the team can be as damaging in some ways as the physical injury. As appropriate, continue to include the student in team practices, games, and social events.

The Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) provides workshops and training programs for school administrators, educators, teacher-coaches, and student athletes. The MIAA Partners in Prevention is a consortium of more than 60 health, wellness, and safety organizations working together to provide resources and programming to schools and communities. The MIAA Sports Medicine Committee, comprising athletic directors, physicians, school nurses, administrators, and coaches, strives to ensure the safety of our students. The MIAA Youth Substance Misuse Prevention Collaborative is a committee of key Commonwealth stakeholders who provide prevention programming and resources. For information about MIAA initiatives and programming, please call **508/541-7997** or visit our website (www.miaa.net).

The MIAA is the Massachusetts Alliance Partner for the Partnership for Drug Free Kids. Learn more about the Partnership on its website: http://www.drugfree.org/

For more information and resources on preventing substance misuse:

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse offers a number of free health education resources from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. https://massclearinghouse.ehs.state.ma.us/

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline provides free and anonymous information and referrals for alcohol and other substance use problems. http://helpline-online.com/ 1-800-327-5050 TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370

Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, oversees treatment for substance use disorders in the Commonwealth. http://www.mass.gov/dph/bsas

National Institute for Drug Abuse (part of the National Institutes of Health) is charged with advancing the science of addiction, and provides the latest research and resources. https://www.drugabuse.gov/