



BLUE CARD CONCUSSION INITIATIVE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative is the result of a trial conducted by the Northland Rugby Union in 2014. Following this very successful trial New Zealand Rugby has approved the introduction of the initiative in other provinces, subject to compliance with the protocols and practices detailed in the NZ Rugby Booklet “**Blue Card Concussion Initiative - Protocols and Implementation Procedures for Provincial Unions**”.

PROCESS

The Blue Card Concussion Initiative is an “On-Field” process introduced to enhance player safety and welfare. It enables the referee to initiate a formal process when a player sustains a head and/or concussion or suspected concussion injury during a match. If the referee believes a player has been concussed, or suspects a player has been concussed, the referee must show a Blue Card to that player, and that player will be required to leave the playing area. This player cannot return and play in that match. Further, the player shown a Blue Card should not return to train and must not return to play in any future match without first meeting the requirements of the return to play protocol, as set out in the NZ Rugby *Blue Card Concussion Initiative Booklet*.

In situations where a player sustains a head and/or concussion injury at training or such injury is noticed after a match, team management must adopt normal care and responsibility for player safety and welfare by implementing the practices and procedures detailed in the NZ Rugby programme, *Rugby Smart*.

QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

- Q. As a referee, am I liable if I don't blue card a player and subsequently the player is found to have been concussed?
- A. **No. The Blue Card Initiative has been introduced to enhance player safety and welfare. Player safety and welfare is the joint responsibility of many, the referee is not held solely responsible or liable.**

- Q. Can a player be blue carded retrospectively (post-match)?
- A. A Blue Card can only be issued on the field, by a referee. Refer to Process (above).
- Q. If a player is blue carded and is subsequently not diagnosed with concussion by a doctor, is the player able to immediately return to play/training? If not, why not?
- A. The Community concussion guidelines are applicable to concussion and suspected concussion. These guidelines do not provide an avenue for reducing the stand-down period. A player who has been blue carded is deemed to have reached the threshold of at least having a suspected concussion. As there is no gold-standard test that a doctor can do post-match to reliably diagnose or exclude concussion in their rooms, we err on the side of caution. A person with concussion can appear normal at rest (in the doctor's rooms) but become symptomatic with activity including contact after being 'cleared'. Therefore, a doctor can only exclude a concussion over time, hence maintaining the value of a stand-down period. We are hopeful that in the future we will be able to reduce this stand-down period to a shorter time but the mechanisms for providing safe care across the country do not allow this at present. Player safety and welfare is paramount.
- Q. Should a professional rugby player be blue carded in a premier club game, what process is followed?
- A. The formal Return to Play protocols applicable to Professional Players applies.
- Q. A professional player was issued with a Blue Card in a club match and returned to play the following week, how can this happen?
- A. A professional player who has been issued with a Blue Card follows the formal Return to Play protocols applicable to Professional Players. This player has been benchmark tested at the commencement of the season and is monitored daily by a doctor. The player has also followed the Graduated Return To Play protocol under direct medical supervision at each stage. This includes computerised testing to demonstrate he/she has recovered.
- Q. If it is thought that a Blue Card may have been issued in error, can this be reviewed?
- A. Yes, the decision of a referee to issue a blue card to a player can be reviewed by an independent specialist medical doctor with expertise in the management of concussion and/or traumatic brain injury. A list of specialists approved to perform this review will be supplied by NZ Rugby on request.
- Q. Do Assistant Referees need to be trained?
- A. This is desirable, but not essential. Only a referee can issue a Blue Card. The referee may issue a blue card after consulting with the Assistant Referee. In receiving a report from an Assistant Referee, the referee must take into consideration whether or not the Assistant Referee has participated in the training programme.

- Q. What level of rugby will this policy encompass? i.e. 1st XV and above?
A. Initially, each Provincial Union will be responsible for determining the grades the Blue Card Initiative will apply. In 2017 all Mitre 10 Cup provinces must implement the Blue Card Initiative in all grades of adult rugby i.e. all grades without an age criteria/restriction. Heartland Provinces are also encouraged to commence introduction of the initiative at their discretion.
- Q. Is there a level of qualification required for referees to have the authority to issue blue card? i.e. can it be an Associate Referee or 'You Make The Call' referee?
A. Only Registered (affiliated) Referees who have participated in the required training course, can issue a blue card.
- Q. Can a coach or manager ask for a player to be blue carded? Can this be done for their own team or opposition?
A. A blue card can only be issued on the field, by a referee. Refer to Process (above).
- Q. Where can I find more information on what to look for when assessing the likelihood of concussion?
A. The Concussion Recognition Tool can be very helpful with this. This is available at this link: <http://bjsm.bmj.com/content/47/5/267.full.pdf>
- Q. Can a player be issued with a blue card (*compelled to undertake Blue Card protocols*) by his coach or club (for instance, from a training incident)?
A. A blue Card can only be issued on the field, by a referee. Refer to Process (above).
- Q. Must a player issued with a Blue Card undertake two visits to a Doctor to comply with the Graduated Return To Play protocols?
A. It is strongly recommended this practice be adopted. The player should visit a doctor within 24 hours of sustaining the knock to the head and then again to obtain a clearance to return to play. The minimum requirement is for the player to visit a doctor to obtain a medical clearance/certificate to return to play.
- Q. In complying with the GRTP protocols to obtain an assessment and/or medical clearance, will I be reimbursed for any medical expenses I incur?
A. Most costs should be covered by ACC. NZ Rugby will reimburse the surcharge for one visit to your local medical practitioner.
- Q. How does a player obtain reimbursement of this surcharge?
A. The player will need to pay the surcharge, retain the receipt and provide it to their Provincial Union for reimbursement.

