



BLUE CARD

CONCUSSION INITIATIVE PROTOCOLS AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES FOR PROVINCIAL UNIONS



NEW ZEALAND RUGBY UNION INCORPORATED

Wellington
Ph: +64 4 499 4995
PO Box 2172
Wellington

Auckland
Ph: +64 9 300 4995
PO Box 2453
Shortland Street

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT
www.nzrugby.co.nz
www.coachingtoolbox.co.nz
www.smallblacks.co.nz

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative is the result of a trial conducted by Northland Rugby Union in 2014.

Player welfare is a major priority and Northland Rugby Union was concerned players who had sustained a knock to the head, were continuing to play rugby without appropriate medical clearances.

As a result, a process was introduced to improve player welfare in relation to head knocks and/or concussion.

Northland Rugby Union developed a thorough and robust set of protocols and practices to address this important player welfare issue.

Following the success of the trial, NZ Rugby approved the introduction of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative in other provinces in New Zealand, subject to compliance with the protocols and practices detailed in this booklet.

These protocols and practices are consistent with those implemented by Northland Rugby Union in the 2014 trial and are mandatory when implementing this initiative.

BLUE CARD CONCUSSION INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION PROTOCOLS

Implementing the NZ Rugby Blue Card Concussion Initiative requires the following actions:

1. Provincial Rugby Union Board and Management supports the introduction of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative to support and enhance player safety and welfare.
2. Provincial Rugby Union Management delivers an education programme to all clubs and schools (if applicable) in the Union to outline the details and requirements of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative. This process is critical to obtain support and endorsement of the initiative by Clubs and Schools.
3. Provincial Rugby Union Management consults with Referees Association to outline the purpose and protocols to be adopted in implementing the Blue Card Concussion Initiative. The Provincial Union Referee Association ensures members participate in the education programme developed to implement the Blue Card Concussion Initiative.
4. Provincial Rugby Union Management advises the relevant district health authorities of the purpose and protocols associated with implementation of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative and seek cooperation and support of the local health providers, including a process to provide all local medical practitioners with details of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative.
5. Having educated all Clubs, Schools (if applicable) Referees Association, and having informed the regional health authorities, the Provincial Union determines the specific levels of rugby the Blue Card Initiative will apply to. Union's need to recognise the level of referee experience required to confidently apply the Blue Card Concussion Initiative. Provincial Union Management will advise the Referees Association the grades of rugby the Blue Card Initiative will apply to in the province.
6. All affected stakeholders are formally advised.
7. All Referees involved in refereeing grades of rugby in

which the Blue Card Initiative applies, must receive specialist training in identifying the key signs of concussion.

This training can only be delivered by a medical practitioner approved by NZ Rugby. A Provincial Union must submit the name of the medical practitioner to the NZ Rugby Medical Director for approval, prior to the training being conducted.

It is expected that this medical practitioner will either be a doctor already contracted to the PU to provide healthcare and medical advice to the Union and/or its players or another doctor that has specialist knowledge in concussion management.

The Provincial Union is to maintain a register of referees who have undertaken the training. Participation in this training should also be recorded on the individual's training record in the National Rugby Database.

8. Provincial Union Management must introduce local Competition Rules which comply with all NZ Rugby Blue Card Concussion Initiative protocols, including the loss of competition points for teams not complying.
9. When implementing the Blue Card Concussion Initiative, Provincial Rugby Union Management must comply with all NZ Rugby Off-Field Follow Up Processes and administrative/record keeping requirements, which include:
 - Establishment and maintenance of a Blue Card Concussion Register (refer template page 12)
 - Process to forward a letter to the Club/Team Management of all Blue Carded players advising of requirement to meet all Graduated Return To Play (GRTP) Protocols before returning to play.
 - Blue Carded player being required to produce medical clearance to resume playing.
 - Advise NZ Rugby of the PU staff member responsible for managing and administering implementation of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative.

ON-FIELD PROCESSES/PROCEDURES

WORLD RUGBY LAW 3.10:

THE REFEREE'S POWER TO STOP AN INJURED PLAYER FROM CONTINUING

(a) If the referee decides - with or without the advice of a doctor or other medically qualified person - that a player is so injured that the player should stop playing, the referee may order that player to leave the playing area. The referee may also order an injured player to leave the field in order to be medically examined.

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY DOMESTIC SAFETY LAW VARIATION (DSL) 3.10 (B)

10. THE REFEREE'S POWER TO STOP AN INJURED PLAYER FROM CONTINUING

Add a new clause:

(b) Without limiting Law 3.10 above, in Provincial Unions that have been approved by New Zealand Rugby to take part in the Blue Card Concussion Initiative, 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, and not return and play in that match. Further the player shown a Blue Card may not return to play in any future match without first meeting the requirements of the return to play protocol, as set out in this *Blue Card Concussion Initiative* booklet.

OFF-FIELD FOLLOW UP PROCESSES/PROCEDURES

REFEREE AND TEAM COACH

1. Issuing of Blue Card (by Referee) initiates:
 - a. Identification of concussed player on Provincial Union official team sheet.
 - b. Provincial Union will forward a letter to the Club and player confirming that the player has been stood down from playing rugby because of a concern regarding concussion. This letter will outline the procedure to facilitate the player's return to training and playing.
 - c. Provincial Union will enter player and incident details into the Blue Card Concussion Initiative Player register.

OFF-FIELD FOLLOW UP PROCESSES/PROCEDURES - PLAYER

The issuing of a Blue Card by the Referee initiates implementation of the Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) outlined on the back cover of this booklet.

The following specific details are noted:

All players suspected of being concussed should not drink alcohol after the game.

It is strongly recommended that a suspected concussed player seek medical attention within 24 hours.

The player must have completed the return to play requirements as stipulated in the *NZ Rugby - Community Rugby - Returning to Play Following Concussion Guidelines*.

These include:

- Having rested until they have no on-going symptoms; and
- Having completed the minimum rest period from playing; and

- Having undertaken a Graduated Return to Play Protocol (NZ Rugby DSLV Law 10.3 (b)); and
- Having seen a medical doctor to obtain a clearance to resume playing.

The player must produce a signed copy of the required Medical Clearance from a medical doctor.

This must be provided to the Provincial Union office at least 24 hours before scheduled match in which a return to play is planned.

Incorrectly issued Blue Card

In rare circumstances a player may challenge the issuing of a Blue Card. See page 8 for details. A player or club wishing to consider this option are urged to contact their provincial union office to discuss further.

OFF-FIELD FOLLOW UP PROCESSES/PROCEDURES - PROVINCIAL RUGBY UNION

1. Introduce and maintain Blue Card (player identified with concussion) register.
2. Forward letter to club of player reminding club/team of the need for this player to obtain a Medical Clearance in order to return to play.
3. Monitor return to play of all players issued with Blue Card.
4. Introduce competition rules sanctioning team/club if they play a player who has not presented a Medical Certificate to confirm fitness to return to play.
5. Provincial Rugby Union to submit Blue Card (player identified with concussion) Register to New Zealand Rugby (as required).

REFEREE TRAINING

All registered referees, officiating grades of rugby the Blue Card applies to, must undertake a specific training and development session focussing on identifying the symptoms of concussion. This training session must be conducted by an appropriate medical professional, approved by NZR.

PROVINCIAL UNION APPLICATION TO IMPLEMENT

Provincial Unions implementing the NZ Rugby Blue Card Concussion Initiative must comply with all NZ Rugby protocols and implementation procedures. Page 10 of this booklet provides an Application to Implement form which is to be submitted to NZ Rugby upon all key steps detailed on the form, having been completed.

Once approval is granted, NZ Rugby will forward a supply of Blue Cards to the Provincial Union for distribution to referees officiating the grades of rugby the Blue Card Concussion Initiative applies.

PLAYER FROM ANOTHER PROVINCIAL UNION ISSUED WITH BLUE CARD

In the event a player from another Provincial Union (where the Blue Card Concussion Initiative is not in place) is issued with a Blue Card all NZ Rugby protocols and practices apply. The issuing Provincial Union forwards advice of the Blue Card to the player's home province and the player must comply with the Graduated Return to Play protocols before resuming contact training and playing.

INCORRECTLY ISSUED BLUE CARD

Where there are grounds to consider that a Blue Card may have been issued incorrectly this may be reviewed.

The mechanism by which this can be reviewed is dependent of the circumstances under which it is believed that the Blue Card was incorrectly issued.

INCORRECT PLAYER IDENTIFIED

(refer to documentation on the management of this situation)

PLAYER WAS INCORRECTLY CONSIDERED SUSPECTED OF BEING CONCUSSED

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.

This specialist should be identified prior to the season commencing and must be approved by the NZ Rugby Medical Director.

The specialist must produce a letter for the player confirming that concussion is no longer suspected and that in their opinion the Blue Card was issued in error. This letter must be supplied to the Provincial Union administrator no less than 24 hours prior to the next match the player is planning to play in.

It is noted that the specialist may require more than one visit to complete their assessment, or alternatively may require additional investigations.

The costs related to this assessment will be borne by the player/club.

The receipt of a letter from the specialist clearing the player of concussion will result in the rescinding of the Blue Card. This allows the player to be free to return to full training and playing immediately providing that the alternative explanation for the circumstances of the Blue Card are not in themselves a reason for the player to be stood-down. Further consideration of this reason and circumstances sits outside the Blue Card protocol.

BLUE CARD CONCUSSION INITIATIVE PROVINCIAL UNION APPLICATION TO IMPLEMENT

PROVINCIAL UNION:

	ACTION	Date Completed	Details/Outcome
1	<p>Provincial Union Board and Management adopts the Blue Card Concussion Initiative.</p> <p>Staff member is appointed to manage implementation of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative.</p>		<p><i>Advise Board Meeting approval date.</i></p> <p><i>Advise name of staff member</i></p>
2	<p>Provincial Union Management delivers education programme to Clubs and Schools (if applicable) of grades the Blue Card Concussion Initiative will apply.</p>		<p><i>Advise relevant meeting dates</i></p>
3	<p>Provincial Union Management introduce sanction(s) for teams not adhering to Graduated Return to Play (G RTP) Protocols.</p>		<p><i>Outline sanctions introduced</i></p>
4	<p>Provincial Union Management informs District/Local Area Health Board of the implementation of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative and the levels of rugby it applies to.</p>		<p><i>Advise process adopted</i></p>

5	Provincial Union Management ensure the Referee Training session is delivered to provide referees with training in identifying the key signs of concussion.		<i>Advise date of meeting</i>
6	Referee Training session provider approved by NZ Rugby		<i>Date approved</i>
7	Grades of Rugby/ Competitions the Blue Card Initiative will be applied are finalised.		<i>List grades/ competitions the Blue Card will apply to</i>
8	Clubs/schools are formally advised of the implementation of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative		<i>Provide copy of letter</i>

LETTER OF NOTIFICATION TO PLAYER

Player Name:
Game Details:
Date of game:
Referee:

Dear _____ (insert name of player),

This letter confirms that you were issued with a Blue Card during the match listed above.

As a result, you are stood down from rugby until you have completed a full return to play protocol. This is to ensure your risk of further injury is reduced as far as possible.

As per the NZ Rugby Blue Card procedure, you are now required to undertake the following steps to return to play:

- Rest until you have no on-going symptoms; and
- Complete the minimum rest period from playing; and
- Undertake a Graduated Return to Play Protocol (see below); and
- See a medical doctor to obtain a clearance to resume playing.

Please note that the medical clearance below, must be signed by a Medical Practitioner and returned to the (insert PU name) office 24 hours before your scheduled return to play.

As per the NZ Rugby Blue Card Concussion Initiative protocols - playing without the required clearance will result in (insert appropriate sanction) as per the NZ Rugby protocols and the (insert PU name) competition rules.

If you have concern regarding this letter and its contents you should contact myself to discuss further in the first instance.

Thank you for your understanding and support in this matter.

Kind Regards

(Insert signature and contact details of responsible PU person)

MEDICAL CLEARANCE FORM

I _____ (insert name), have assessed the above player on the _____ (insert dates) and confirm that they have completed the return to play requirements as outlined in the New Zealand Rugby guidelines - Returning to Play following Concussion and I hereby permit this player to return to play rugby.

Signed: _____ NZ Medical Council Number _____

LETTER OF NOTIFICATION TO CLUB

Player Name:
Game Details:
Date of game:
Referee:

To (insert name of Club Official) of (insert Club name),

The player listed above is hereby stood down from rugby until further notice due to having sustained a concussion or suspected concussion. As per the NZ Rugby Blue Card protocols, this player is now required to obtain clearance from a doctor prior to returning to playing rugby. Please find attached a letter outlining this procedure for the player to provide to the player's doctor along with this letter.

Please note that the medical clearance must be signed by a Medical Practitioner and returned to the (insert PU name) office 24 hours before the scheduled match in which the player wishes to return.

As per the NZ Rugby Blue Card protocols - playing a player who has been issued with a Blue Card without the required clearance will (insert appropriate sanction) as per the (insert PU name) Competition rules

Thank you for your understanding in this matter and for promoting safety amongst our players.

Kind Regards

(Insert signature of responsible PU person)

LETTER OF NOTIFICATION TO LOCAL HEALTH AUTHORITY

(Insert PU letterhead)

(Insert date)

(Insert name and address of relevant party - DHB/ PHO/ GP clinics/ A&E clinics)

Dear (insert name of relevant party),

Blue Card Concussion Procedure in Community Rugby

The (insert PU name) takes player welfare extremely seriously. In (insert year) the (insert PU abbreviation) is initiating a procedure to ensure players that sustain a concussion receive sufficient medical treatment before returning to rugby. The (insert PU abbreviation) realises that for this procedure to be credible, the support of all health care providers across (insert provincial area) is vital.

The procedure will be implemented from the (insert start date) to all grades from (insert grade) and above.

Concussion Management Procedure

A player is shown a Blue Card if, during the course of a match, a referee identifies they have suffered a blow and consequently show indications to suggest that they may be suffering from concussion. The issuing of a Blue Card triggers a formal off-field follow up procedure.

After the match the referee will inform the PU person responsible for the Blue Card procedure that such an incident has occurred.

(Insert name and title of PU responsible person) will draft a letter to the club and player concerned confirming that the player has been stood down from playing rugby because of concussion or suspected concussion. This letter will provide detail of the process by which they can ultimately return to play.

The Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) process is outlined on the back cover of this booklet.

The essential elements of this guideline are that a player must:

- Have no on-going symptoms; and
- Have completed the minimum rest period from playing; and
- Have undertaken a graduated return to play protocol; and
- Have been cleared by a doctor to return to play.

Medical practitioner involvement

It is strongly recommended that the suspected concussed player seeks medical attention within 24 hours of the injurious event to be assessed and provided with initial advice. It is recommended that the doctor perform a SCAT3 test on the first visit to achieve an initial post injury score. This document can be obtained here - <http://bjism.bmj.com/content/47/5/259.full.pdf> or by searching for SCAT3 online.

It is mandatory that no doctor overrule a concussed player allowing them to return to play before 3 weeks as they have been witnessed to show signs of concussion on the field.

Having completed a graduated return to play process as outlined in the guideline, a player must obtain medical clearance to resume playing. It is recommended that a SCAT3 test is completed during the clearance visit. It may be possible to compare to a prior SCAT3 result if this was done at the time of the event occurring.

The player is required to have their doctor complete a form to indicate that they have been cleared and provide this to the Provincial Union representative.

A player must produce a clearance letter to be signed by the medical practitioner then return to the (insert PU) to be permitted to resume playing. The player will have been provided with a specific form for this purpose. This must be received by the (insert PU) office 24 hours before scheduled return to play.

The player is then cleared to return to play.

Payments for consultations

Players will require an assessment by a medical practitioner, after they have been Blue Carded to be cleared to return to play. Players are able to obtain reimbursement of the ACC surcharges associated with this visit by submitting the receipt to their Provincial Union.

Notes:

The card removes any doubt as to whether the player should be removed on the suspicion of a concussion being present. There can be no opportunity for the player to return to the field on that same day if he/she “recovers”.

This procedure does not set aside the need for the mandatory stand-down period as outlined in the NZR protocols.

The procedure outlined has been developed by New Zealand Rugby (NZR) who have applied a comprehensive set of protocols for implementation of this initiative in the community game. A copy of these protocols is enclosed.

Thank you for your support as we look to improve the care of concussion in the community game.

Kind regards

(Insert signature of responsible PU person)

GRADUATED RETURN TO PLAY PROTOCOL

See the Graduated Return to Play stages outlined on the back cover of this booklet.

Algorithm of Blue Card Event

Player receives a blue card during a match.

(This includes players who are awarded Blue Card by the ref directly and those who are removed by the team with suspected concussion. This ensures that all players who are concussed or suspected of concussion enter the Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) protocol.



Referee submits name(s) to PU post-match.



Player and club receives a letter from the Provincial Union (Player may have already seen a doctor prior to this or the letter will suggest this happens - NZR do not pay for this and it is not compulsory)



Player completes the compulsory rest period, ensures asymptomatic and GRTP.



Player sees doctor after contact stage of GRTP but before playing.



Medical clearance received by Provincial Union



Player cleared to play

CONCUSSION

GRADUATED RETURN TO PLAY (GRTP)

All players diagnosed with a concussion or suspected concussion must go through the GRTP described in this poster. For more information talk to your coach, your local union, contact New Zealand Rugby or check out rugbysmart.co.nz

GRADUATED RETURN TO PLAY STAGES

Minimum Time

Rehab stage

19 Years+

Under 19

1	Complete mental and physical rest until symptoms have cleared.	14 days	14 days
2	Once symptom-free, light aerobic exercise, such as walking or stationary cycling.	2 days	2 days
3	Rugby-specific exercise, such as running or ball-handling activities only if symptom-free. NO head impact activities.	1 day	2 days
4	Non-contact training drills until medical clearance given and only if symptom-free.	1 day	2 days
5	Once medical clearance has been given, full contact training	2 days	2 days
6	Return to play		

RECOGNISE | REMOVE | RECOVER | RETURN



Rugby Smart

