



MEMORANDUM

To: **Community Football stakeholders**

From: **AFL Game Development, AFL Legal & Regulatory**

Date: **20 March 2024**

Re: **Summary of 2024 amendments to AFL Community Concussion Guidelines**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a summary of the substantive amendments to The Management of Sport Related Concussion in Australian Football (**AFL Community Concussion Guidelines**) for 2024.

The AFL Community Concussion Guidelines have been prepared by the AFL's Chief Medical Officer Dr Michael Makdissi in conjunction with the AFL's Medical Working Group. They provide a practical translation of the evidence and recommendations from the [6th International Conference on Concussion in Sport](#) as they relate to Australian Football. They also take into consideration recommendations from other documents such as the Australian Institute of Sport [Concussion and Brain Health and Position Statement 2024](#) and community guidelines of other major professional and participation sports in Australia (including Rugby League, Rugby Union and Soccer).

Following that extensive review process, the following substantive amendments will apply in 2024:

1. The **earliest** that a player may return to play (once they have completed a graded loading program and have obtained medical clearance) is on the 21st day following the concussion (where the day of concussion is designated day "0"). Previously, the earliest that a player could return was on the 12th day following the concussion. This means that a player who is concussed in a match on a Saturday will miss at least the next two Saturday matches and will only be able to return to play on the third Saturday (i.e., the 21st day after the concussion was sustained) if they have recovered according to the protocols and have been medically cleared to return to play. In many cases, recovery will be slower than the minimum 21 days.

The AFL Community Concussion Guidelines continue to reiterate how concussion presents and the rate and pattern of recovery, vary from person to person and injury to injury. Players will also have different individual circumstances and the **return to play program must be individualised based on progress, rather than the number of days since the incident.**

Examples of return-to-play timelines based on patterns of recovery following concussion:



2. In the first 24-48 hours after a concussion, a period of relative rest is recommended. This means players should be allowed to engage in activities of daily living such as reading, walking and light physical activity. It is worth noting that there may be benefit in reducing screen time in the first 24-48 hours, however, it may not be effective beyond that.
3. The recovery stage begins following the period of relative rest (24-48 hours). The recovery stage should start even if the player has some concussion symptoms. Participating in progressive activity has been shown to be safe and may improve recovery from concussion symptoms. Previously, players were advised that they could only progress their activity if they remained symptom-free during and after the activity.
4. Mild and brief worsening of symptoms is acceptable in the recovery stage (i.e. an increase of no more than 2 points on a 10-point scale for less than an hour compared with the baseline value reported before physical activity). If there is greater than mild worsening of symptoms, then the player should stop exercising and attempt to exercise at the same level the next day. Previously, players were advised that if there was any worsening of symptoms, they were to return to the previous symptom free step.

The AFL Community Concussion Guidelines continue to require clearance by a medical practitioner before a player can return to full contact training and match play. This will include player (parent/guardian) certification that they have fully recovered, have no further symptoms and have completed the entire return to play protocol. Clearance to return to play should not be before the minimum time of 21 days but in many cases may be longer.

It is important to note that the AFL Community Concussion Guidelines apply to all levels of football outside the elite AFL and AFLW competitions including State League and Talent Pathway competitions. In AFL and AFLW, where there are advanced care settings for players suffering a concussion, the mandatory minimum 12-day return to play protocol will be maintained. This is based upon access to regular high-quality multidisciplinary care, that generally is not available in other competitions.

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