Every year, over 140,000 high school athletes suffer a concussion, with boys and girls at a similar risk. A new state law is encouraging Indiana parents to become more aware of concussion risks and learn new ways to treat and prevent them.

If your child participates in high school sports, there is a new state law that requires both of you to read, sign and return an information sheet acknowledging the risks of concussions and head injuries. The new law, which took effect July 1, also states that if your child suffers a head injury during a practice or game, he or she must be removed and not return without written clearance from a health care professional.

According to the 2009-10 High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study, more than 140,000 high school athletes suffer a concussion each year. Football players are still the mostly likely of all high school athletes to suffer concussions, but the injury is seen in nearly every sport. Girls have similar risks as boys in most sports, but they appear to have a greater risk for more concussions in basketball and soccer.

**What is a concussion?**
Concussions are injuries to the brain that affect the way the brain works. Signs and symptoms can include lightheadedness, dizziness, fogginess, headaches, fuzzy vision, confusion, memory loss, unsteadiness or just not feeling right. A majority of athletes do not lose consciousness.

There's no specific test to diagnose a concussion. If there is a trauma to the head with symptoms like those described above that are directly related to the injury, then a concussion is usually determined.

**How is it treated?**
If your child shows any of these symptoms, he or she should be promptly examined and not allowed to return to practice or games until medically cleared.

Once a concussion is diagnosed, the athlete is not allowed to participate in practice or games, and other mental and physical activity is often limited. The athlete may only resume activity after another evaluation by a health care professional. Depending on the severity, resumption of activity may need to be gradual.

The Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing (ImPACT) Program is an important tool that helps health care professionals manage head injuries and determine when a student athlete can safely return to practice and play. Your child will be given a computer-based test that objectively measures the brain's function by focusing on attention, memory, processing speed and reaction time. Certified ImPACT clinicians use this test to help determine when it is safe for your child to return to play.

Riley specialists recommend that all athletes ages 11 and older take an ImPACT baseline test during the preseason. If an athlete suffers a concussion, the test is performed again to give the treating physician information on your child's brain function for comparison and analysis.

If your child suffers a concussion during play and he or she hasn’t taken a baseline test during the preseason, it still is imperative that you seek medical attention for your child's concussion.

**What are some of the long-term implications?**
- The younger the athlete, the longer for concussions to resolve.
- The younger the athlete, the higher the risk of long-term problems if the athlete has a head injury on top of a concussion that is not completely healed.
- Return to play on the same day of an injury should never be allowed for children and adolescents—regardless of their level of athletic performance.

Without prompt and proper medical attention, a concussion may affect your child's grades and mental health.