The Inter-Association Task Force Document on Emergency Health and Safety: Best-Practice Recommendations for Youth Sports Leagues

Robert A. Huggins, PhD, ATC* †‡‡; Samantha E. Scarneo, MS, ATC* †‡‡; Douglas J. Casa, PhD, ATC, FNATA, FACSM* †; Luke N. Belval, MS, ATC, CSCS* †; Kate S. Carr‡; George Chiampas, DO‡§¶; Michael Clayton, MS#; Ryan M. Curtis, MS, ATC* †; A. J. Duffy III, MS, PT, ATC*; Alexandra Flury‡; Matthew Gammons, MD**; Yuri Hosokawa, PhD, ATC* †; John F. Jardine, MD †; Cynthia R. LaBella, MD† †; Rachel Oats, CAE*; Jack W. Ransone, PhD, ATC, FACSM*; Scott R. Sailor, EdD, ATC*; Katie Scott, MS, ATC*; Rebecca L. Stearns, PhD, ATC* †; Lesley W. Vandermark, PhD, ATC* †; Timothy Weston, MEd, ATC* †

*National Athletic Trainers’ Association; †Korey Stringer Institute, University of Connecticut; ‡Safe Kids Worldwide; §US Soccer Federation; ¶Northwestern University; #USA Wrestling; **American Medical Society for Sports Medicine; ††American Academy of Pediatrics; ‡‡Co-Chair

Recent data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association1 on youth sport participation suggest that 30,893,455 children ages 6 to 14 years participated at least once in 1 or more reported activities or sports during 2015. Many of these children participate in sport programs that are governed by organizations known as national governing bodies (NGBs) for youth sports. These entities strive to promote fair play, increase physical activity, and provide critical life lessons, values, and morals to their members, all in a safe environment. Although many NGBs meet these goals, the area of safety policies and best practices offers room for improvement.

Data from emergency department visits by children ages 6 to 18 years indicated that 39% of life-threatening injuries were sport related2; however, few to no data regarding sudden death during participation in youth sports are available. Unpublished data on 34 youth (≤14 years of age) sport-related deaths from 2010 through 2014 collected by the Korey Stringer Institute3 at the University of Connecticut demonstrated that 24% of these deaths (n = 8) occurred during participation in youth sport leagues. Cardiac conditions, which are traditionally the most commonly identified cause of death at all levels of sport, were responsible for 47% (n = 16). From 2000 through 2014, baseball (n = 5), soccer (n = 4), football (n = 3), basketball (n = 2), and lacrosse (n = 1) accounted for all deaths in youth athletes <12 years of age. Given the large youth sport participation rates1 and scarcity of published data other than emergency room–documented sudden deaths in youth sports,2 it is imperative to improve sport safety policies and strive toward best practices. Catastrophic injury is an obvious threat to this population. With increased awareness of the potential causes of death and implementation of preventive mechanisms, member organizations can improve the health and safety of these young athletes.

Each NGB functions independently; therefore, implementing best-practice health and safety policies at the youth sport level is challenging. Currently, no single entity oversees governance for all youth sports. As a result, uniformity in safety policies and procedures across organizations is lacking. Governing bodies often encounter difficulty enforcing current best-practice policies and may only be able to recommend or create guidelines rather than mandate change. Potential barriers NGBs encounter when attempting to mandate policy include high rates of participation, a wide range of age groups, budgetary restrictions, diverse geographic locations, and a lack of internal administration. These barriers were commonly expressed by youth sport NGB leaders during the 2015 and 2016 Youth Sport Safety Governing Bodies meetings held in New York, New York.4

In an effort to improve the emergency health and safety best practices and policies in youth sport, this document was developed to serve as a road map for policy and procedure recommendations. It addresses the most common conditions resulting in sudden death and outlines recommended policies and procedures designed to improve youth sport safety. It serves as a call to action for youth sport NGBs to provide support systems for member organizations and to educate league leaders and their members about the current best practices regarding emergency action plans.
sudden cardiac arrest (SCA), exertional heat stroke (EHS), and brain and neck injury protocols. The document also discusses preexisting medical conditions, environmental conditions, and emergency medical care, such as the use of athletic training services. These concerns were discussed at the January 21, 2016 Youth Sport Safety Governing Bodies Meeting in New York, New York, in an effort to promote positive change and assist with the strategic implementation and advancement of the best health and safety practices in youth sports.

Each organization is unique, and therefore each will need to address policy and procedure recommendations differently to ensure successful implementation of best practices. Furthermore, all best-practice policy and procedure recommendations may not be necessary for each sport (e.g., a lightning policy for most indoor sports). Many deaths in youth sports are preventable. The goal of this document is to support youth sport NGBs and provide them with the structure and tools to prevent avoidable deaths.

RECOMMENDED YOUTH SPORT NGB SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

The organizations that were invited to and participated in the meetings and endorsed this document are listed in Appendix A. Those organizations that have officially endorsed the document are referred to throughout the document as the Task Force. Other definitions used in this document appear in the Table. The Task Force recommends NGBs implement the following:

1. Each NGB should endorse the creation of EAPs to be put in place by all member organizations and provide templates for and assistance in the development of the EAPs.
2. If a strategy to direct its member organizations toward resources for appropriate emergency equipment and medical services is not already in place, each NGB should develop one.
3. Each NGB should develop a training structure to provide education related to emergency health and safety best practices for all members, including but not limited to member leaders, member coaches, and parents or guardians of member athletes (see the Table for role definitions).
4. Each NGB should make available to all members training modules or educational content on best practices related to the following:
   a. Emergency action plans
   b. Sudden cardiac arrest
   c. Brain and neck injury
   d. Exertional heat stroke
   e. Preexisting medical conditions
   f. Environmental conditions
   g. Medical services
5. Each NGB should recommend the development of an educational training and certification reporting system for member organizations and member coaches related to the content areas listed in item 4.
6. Each NGB should recommend the development of a reporting structure or system to monitor noncompliance as each member organization moves toward the health and safety best-practice policies recommended in this document.
7. Each NGB should recommend that an educational plan be provided to train member organization leaders, who in turn inform member coaches on how to organize and conduct EAP training.

RECOMMENDED POLICIES FOR EAPs

The Task Force agrees that member organizations should

1. Establish venue-specific EAPs. (Strength of Recommendation [SOR] Taxonomy: C; level of evidence [LOE]: 3)
2. Provide access to emergency equipment at each athletic venue as soon as possible. (SOR: B; LOE: 2)
3. Recommend training for member leaders and member coaches in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), including the use of an automated external defibrillator (AED). Training of officials, parents, and athletes is also encouraged. (SOR: B; LOE: 2)
4. Educate member coaches in recognizing emergency situations and factors that increase the risk of catastrophic injury or sudden death. (SOR: B; LOE: 3)
5. Review the general EAP annually or as needed.5,7,15 (SOR: C; LOE: 3)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EAP PROCEDURE IMPLEMENTATION

The EAP should be implemented in concert with local emergency medical service (EMS) providers by the member leader (ie, league safety officer, commissioner, or director) within the youth sport organization who oversees safety responsibilities under the direction of the NGB.

1. Components of the EAP6,15,17
   a. Contact information for EMS and other pertinent emergency numbers
   b. Facility address, locations or maps (or both), specific directions, global positioning system coordinates
   c. Personnel names, contact information, and responsibilities
   d. Emergency equipment needs, including the specific location of each item
   e. Follow-up emergency documentation and reporting actions

Important note: These components should be presented in a clear and logical manner (ideally on 1 sheet of paper) with step-by-step directions for the individual(s) at the event or venue with the assistance of the local EMS.

2. Procedures to establish efficient and effective communication6,15,17
   a. Implement and routinely practice the EAP to be in concert with local EMS.
   b. Provide all member coaches and EMS with copies of the general EAP.
   c. Post the EAP at each venue in an easily visible location (if possible).
   d. Activate the EAP quickly and at the first sign of distress.
   e. Alert any on-site responders to the emergency and its location.
   f. Alert other individuals on-site so they can assist in guiding EMS to the scene.

3. Emergency equipment location and maintenance6,7,15,17,19–21,25
   a. Develop a plan to locate the nearest accessible AED and other emergency equipment. Ideally, an AED is present on-site in a central location so that the device can be immediately retrieved and applied to the individual in need. However, the nearest AED may be located with EMS or in a nearby building. Use of the AED within 1 to 3 minutes of collapse results in the best chance of survival from a cardiac-related, shockable rhythm.19–21
   b. Recommend that member leaders and member coaches perform and document on-site readiness checks of equipment and maintenance of emergency equipment on a regular basis if applicable. This includes battery and lead replacement for AEDs according to manufacturer specifications.7,25
   c. Recommend that any AEDs be registered (according to local ordinances) with EMS so EMS is aware of the community-wide strategic placement, make, model, and type of pads needed before arriving on the scene.20

4. Training and education for member leaders and member coaches3,26–29
   a. Plan in-person or online training sessions to educate member coaches on how to recognize life-threatening situations. Ideally, these sessions should include scenario-based practice with health care professionals27 or a voice advisory manikin.23,26,27
   b. Advise member leaders and member coaches to document their completed competencies and trainings and submit these to the appropriate personnel if required by the NGB.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCA POLICIES

The Task Force agrees that member organizations should

1. Have in place a comprehensive cardiac emergency policy in accordance with the recommendations of the NGB.7,19,21,30 (SOR: C; LOE: 2)

2. Recommend that athletes undergo cardiovascular screening before participating in sport.14,20,30–34 (SOR: B; LOE: 2)

3. Recommend moving toward having an AED on-site and readily available within an appropriate amount of time for all organized events or developing a strategic plan to reduce the time to AED application.19–21,29 (SOR: A; LOE: 2)

4. Educate, on a biannual basis at minimum, member leaders and member coaches on the proper steps for managing SCA.15,19,20,24,29,30 (SOR: B; LOE: 3)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCA PROCEDURE IMPLEMENTATION

1. Components of the comprehensive cardiac policy7,14,21,30,33,34
   a. Cardiac-screening procedures
   b. Procedures to properly manage SCA
   c. Emergency equipment (ie, AED) location and logistics
   d. Education, training, and certification recommendations
   e. Return-to-participation protocol

2. Screening procedure14,30–36

The Task Force supports recommendations from the American Academy of Family Physicians and American Academy of Pediatrics33 and American Medical Society for Sport Medicine30 as the minimum standards for screening using the comprehensive personal history, family history, and physical examination.

3. Procedures for proper management of SCA7,17,19,20,25,28,29

Note: Any youth athlete who has collapsed and is unresponsive should be assumed to be in SCA until proven otherwise or another cause of the collapse is identified.

   a. Prompt recognition of SCA (ie, collapse, brief seizure-like activity, difficulty breathing or gasps, chest pain)
   b. Early activation of EMS via the EAP (ie, call 911)
   c. Early CPR and retrieval and application of the AED (if shock is advised) for a witnessed collapse
      i. If no shock is advised, continue CPR and life-support measures until either the athlete responds or EMS arrives.
      ii. If others are available to assist, have them call 911 and retrieve the AED while CPR continues.
iii. If only 1 person is present, he or she should call 911, retrieve the AED (if readily available on-site), and administer CPR.
iv. If no AED is available, call 911 and administer CPR until help arrives.
d. Transportation to a hospital with advanced life-support capability
e. Emergency equipment location and logistics
   i. On-site AED
      a. Should be readily available (ideally within 1–3 minutes)
      b. Should be in a central location for large-scale events, especially for NGB-sanctioned or -sponsored events. For events located more than 3 minutes from an AED, a separate AED should be available or a plan to obtain the nearest AED should be implemented.
   ii. No AED on-site
      a. Activate EMS and call 911.
      b. Continue CPR and life-support measures until either the athlete responds or EMS arrives.
      c. If others are available to assist, begin 2-person CPR and life-support measures.

4. Education and training or certification\(^5,7,15,30\)

Member leaders and member coaches should be
a. Educated at least biannually about the location, function, and use of AEDs.
b. Educated on prompt recognition of SCA, early activation of EMS, early CPR and defibrillation, and transport of the athlete to the hospital.
c. Informed of proper clearance and return-to-participation procedures for an athlete who has experienced or is experiencing a cardiac-related condition.

5. Recommended return-to-participation protocol\(^17,19,30,34,37\)

a. Youth athletes who experience cardiac problems such as chest pain, fainting or near-fainting episodes, skipped heartbeats, shortness of breath, or excessive fatigue should be evaluated by a physician before return to participation is considered.
b. A physician should discuss clearance decisions with the appropriate consultants and the parents or guardians of youth athletes to make prudent decisions.
c. Clearance for youth athletes with cardiac disorders should be based on physician recommendations and should take into consideration the guidelines from the American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology Task Force.\(^34\)

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRAIN AND NECK INJURY POLICIES**

The Task Force agrees that member organizations should

1. Have a comprehensive medical management plan and policy in accordance with state laws for athletes with a brain or neck injury, including concussion.\(^11–13,15,38\) (SOR: C; LOE: 3)

2. Educate member coaches, athletes, parents, and other pertinent members regarding the plan and policy on a regular basis.\(^11,38–41\) (SOR: C; LOE: 3)

3. Recommend the proper use, fit, and wear of protective equipment.\(^11,38,41,42\) (SOR: B; LOE: 2)

4. Advise that the management of any athletes with brain or neck injuries, including those who do not require emergency medical treatment, be directed by appropriate medical personnel.\(^11,38,41,43\) (SOR: B; LOE: 2)

5. Never permit member coaches to return an athlete to play who is suspected of having a brain or neck injury, including concussion.\(^11,38,41,43\) (SOR: B; LOE: 3)

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRAIN AND NECK INJURY PROCEDURE IMPLEMENTATION**

1. Components of a comprehensive brain and neck injury policy\(^11–13,15,38,41\)
   a. Procedures for management and care of patients with brain or neck injury
   b. Educational information related to the prevention, recognition, treatment, and return-to-play procedures for athletes with brain or neck injuries, including concussion
   c. Appropriate evaluation protocols for when medical personnel are and are not present
   d. Protocols for return to play after brain or neck injury

2. Procedures for proper management and care of brain and neck injury\(^11;13,38,41\)
   a. Activate the on-field care and management of the patient with a brain or neck injury.
   b. The brain or neck injury plan should be implemented for an athlete who experienced, complains of, or was suspected of receiving a hit to the head or neck.
   c. If only nonmedical personnel (ie, coach, teammates, parents, game officials) are present, a patient with a suspected brain or neck injury should not be touched or moved by anyone and the EAP and EMS should be activated. The only time an athlete with a head or neck injury should be moved is if he or she is not breathing or has no pulse and requires compression-only CPR, CPR and AED, or rescue breathing.
   d. If appropriate medical personnel (ie, physician, athletic trainer, health care provider trained in emergency evaluation of the brain and neck) are present, an athlete with a suspected brain or neck injury should be properly stabilized under the direction of the medical personnel. When a brain or neck injury results in the patient’s loss of pulse or respiration, CPR should be initiated and an AED applied if appropriate. If the patient is face down, medical personnel should consider and determine the most appropriate mechanism for maintaining stabilization when rolling the patient to a supine position.
   e. The EMS should be activated and transfer procedures consistent with local protocols should be implemented.

3. Educational information related to brain and neck injuries\(^11–13,38,41,43\)

Member leaders and member coaches should receive education focusing on the prevention, recognition, and management of athletes with brain or neck injury, such as
- the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Brain Injury Safety Tips and Prevention” from “HEADS UP to Youth Sports”\(^44\)
- USA Football’s “Heads Up Football” program\(^45\)
USA Soccer’s “Recognize to Recover, Head and Brain Conditions” information46

a. Education should also include the following information:
   i. The fact that helmets do not prevent concussions in
crushed sports
   ii. The importance of enforcing the rules of the sport
   and instruction on the safest techniques for player-
to-player contact
   iii. How to ensure the safety of the playing surface and
surroundings (ie, boards, nets, posts, fences)
   iv. Proper fit, wear, and maintenance of protective
equipment specific to the sport
   v. Proper reconditioning and recertifying of equipment
   (when appropriate) based on manufacturer guide-
lines
b. Education should also cover each state’s laws related to
concussion management and reporting.

4. Appropriate evaluation protocol for brain-related injury
(specifically concussion)11,38,41

a. If appropriate medical personnel (licensed or certi-
fied health care provider trained in the assessment
and diagnosis of brain-related injury) are not on-site,
the athlete should be removed from the activity and
referred for medical evaluation. An athlete with a
suspected concussion or neck injury should be evaluated
by an appropriate health care provider (not a member
coach or parent unless medically qualified) and should
not be returned to participation until medically cleared.

b. If appropriate medical personnel are present,
evaluation for concussion at the discretion of the
medical provider should be conducted. The athlete
may return to play after evaluation only if the trained
medical professional deems that the athlete does not
have a concussion; however, the athlete may not return
to play if the medical professional’s impression is that
he or she has sustained a concussion.

c. Initial treatment recommendations for concussion, includ-
ing educating the athlete and his or her parents on the need
for cognitive and physical rest until follow-up assessment
determines otherwise, should be provided.

d. Management of the concussion should be in accordance
with state laws.

5. Recommended return-to-participation protocol after a
brain or neck injury11,38,41

a. To prevent a premature return to participation and avoid
placing the athlete at risk for a catastrophic injury, a
graduated return-to-participation progression should be
implemented and closely managed by an appropriate
medical provider.

b. Athletes returning to participation after a brain or neck
injury should be required to obtain written clearance
from an appropriate medical provider specifically
trained in the management of such injury.

c. Suggested return-to-play process (concussion only)11,38,41

The return-to-play process may begin once symptoms
have resolved (unless otherwise directed by a medical
provider) and the athlete is cleared by appropriate medical
personnel.

Step 1: No activity until complete symptom resolution for at
least 24 hours
Step 2: Light aerobic exercise for 20 minutes
Step 3: Sport-specific exercise, which may include interval
aerobic exercise and body-weight resistance exercise
Step 4: Noncontact training drills, which may include shuttle
runs, plyometrics, and noncontact sport-specific drills (eg,
kicking, ball handling)
Step 5: Limited, controlled, and gradual return to full-contact
practice
Step 6: Return to full participation, including games and
competitions

Note: As directed by an appropriate medical professional,
the athlete should not advance to the next step unless he or
she is symptom free at the current step (unless otherwise
specified by appropriate medical personnel) and a minimum
of 24 hours has elapsed between steps.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EHS PREFERENCES

The Task Force agrees that member organizations should

1. Have a heat-acclimatization program and how-to guide in
place before training for sport when applicable (ie, preseason in hot environments, non–climate-controlled
conditions, or new environments in unfamiliar re-

2. Have a medical management plan for the care of athletes
with EHS.8,15 (SOR: C; LOE: 3)

3. Provide education for member leaders, coaches, athletes,
parents, and staff on a periodic basis.8–10,48 (SOR: C; LOE: 3)

4. Have a plan for assessing environmental conditions to prevent
heat-related illnesses including EHS.8,9,15 (SOR: B; LOE: 2)

5. Have a return-to-play plan for athletes who have
experienced EHS.49–52 (SOR: C; LOE: 3)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EHS PROCEDURE

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Components of a comprehensive EHS policy8,9,15

a. Guidelines for environmental monitoring
b. Protocol for heat acclimatization
c. Procedures for proper emergency management of EHS
d. Emergency equipment and logistics
e. Education and training
f. Return-to-play protocol

2. Guidelines for reducing the risk of heat illness8,9,15

a. Monitor the environment using a wet-bulb globe
temperature device, prediction chart, heat index, or
information from a local weather station to assess if it is
safe to exercise, practice, or play in the heat.

b. The threshold for activity modification should be
determined using an on-site environmental monitor and
geographic region–specific guidelines. (See Grundstein et
al53 for region-specific guidelines, and see US Soccer
heat guidelines.54) Predicted wet-bulb globe temperature
calculated from ambient temperature and humidity and
the heat index can provide estimated values, but
interpretation should be done with caution.

3. Evaluations and expectations for providing hydration
should be established by member coaches with their
athletes. Depending on the sport, event, and size, a
sufficient quantity of water or sports drinks should be
brought by the athlete, made available, or placed at various
stations around the athletic venue. Member leaders and
member coaches should ensure that athletes can hydrate quickly and freely but also take regular hydration breaks.

3. Suggested heat-acclimatization protocol\textsuperscript{8,9,15,55,56} 

Specific guidelines outlining equipment use, intensity and duration of exercise, rest breaks, hydration, and total practice time, such as those outlined in the heat-acclimatization guidelines for secondary school athletics,\textsuperscript{55} should be followed.

Procedures for proper management of EHS:

a. Activate the on-field exertional heat-stroke care and management plan.

b. Educate on the prompt recognition of EHS, activation of EMS, importance of immediate cooling, and transport of the athlete to the hospital.

c. Notify the athlete’s medical provider to implement a graduated return-to-participation progression tailored for the severity of the illness.

d. Ensure that athletes returning to participation after EHS should be required to obtain written clearance from an appropriate medical provider specifically trained in heat illness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIALLY LIFE-THREATENING MEDICAL CONDITIONS POLICIES

The Task Force agrees that member organizations should

1. Consider the importance of education about disclosing potentially threatening medical conditions (eg, asthma, anaphylaxis, sickle cell trait, diabetes, epilepsy) to member coaches,\textsuperscript{14,15,58–62} (SOR: B; LOE: 3)

2. Encourage parents or guardians to disclose member athletes’ potentially life-threatening medical conditions,\textsuperscript{15,33,59–61,63–65} (SOR: B; LOE: 3)

3. Encourage parents or guardians of athletes with potentially life-threatening conditions to provide players with appropriate self-administering medication (eg, inhaler, epinephrine injector) as indicated by each athlete’s physician.\textsuperscript{60,61,63,64,66} (SOR: A; LOE: 1)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIALLY LIFE-THREATENING MEDICAL CONDITIONS PROCEDURE IMPLEMENTATION

1. Components of a comprehensive life-threatening medical conditions plan\textsuperscript{14,15,58–62}

a. Educate others on the signs and symptoms related to these conditions.

b. Establish procedures for managing these conditions.

c. Communicate the plan to parents or guardians.

2. Procedures for the proper management of a potentially life-threatening asthma attack\textsuperscript{60,61}

a. If medical personnel are NOT on-site, retrieve the athlete’s medication (eg, inhaler) and provide it to the athlete for self-administration. Successful administration of the medication requires the athlete to remain calm and concentrate on breathing correctly. If requested by the athlete, other individuals may assist with administration of the inhaler. The athlete may administer up to 3 times before medical transport is required. If no improvement occurs after treatment or the condition becomes worse, activate EMS (activate EAP and call 911) immediately.

b. If medical personnel are on-site, retrieve the athlete’s medication, administration, and assist in the proper administration of the medication. The athlete should be monitored by a medical professional knowledgeable about asthma emergencies until breathing returns to normal, and follow-up or referral should be at the discretion of the medical provider.

3. Procedures for the proper management of a potentially life-threatening anaphylactic reaction\textsuperscript{51,66}

a. Personnel (medical or nonmedical) should simultaneously call 911 (and activate the EAP) while retrieving
the athlete’s medication (eg, epinephrine injector) and providing it to the athlete for immediate self-administration in the thigh. The injector should be provided to EMS when they arrive. If medical personnel are present, they may assist the athlete with administration of the injection, especially if the athlete demonstrates signs of anaphylaxis and becomes unconscious; however, state laws pertaining to the administration of lifesaving medications and Good Samaritan laws should dictate proper procedures.

b. After the anaphylactic reaction is treated with epinephrine injection, transport to the hospital for observation is recommended, as the athlete may have a rebound reaction. The EMS protocols will include this direction.

4. Education recommendations

a. Member leaders and member coaches should be educated on the major signs and symptoms of asthma, such as shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness, and recurrent coughing. In an athlete with asthma, these symptoms likely represent an asthma exacerbation (attack). In severe cases of asthma, the athlete may become less responsive or lose consciousness.

b. Member leaders and member coaches should be educated on the major signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis, such as quickly developing rash, hives, swollen lips or tongue, shortness of breath, wheezing, reduced blood pressure, and fainting or collapsing after being exposed to a likely or known allergen.

c. Depending on the severity and number of athletes involved, provide care to those with the most life-threatening injuries while waiting for EMS to arrive.

5. Communication plan

The parents or guardians of all member athletes should be encouraged to complete a form that discloses all known medical conditions. This form should also include a treatment plan for these individuals, consisting of the medications used as well as who will be responsible for ensuring these medications are present during practices and competitions. Furthermore, member organizations should educate parents and guardians on the dangers of not disclosing such conditions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIGHTNING POLICIES

The Task Force agrees that member organizations should

1. Create and enforce a comprehensive lightning safety policy.16,67–71 (SOR: B; LOE: 3)

2. Enforce the slogans supported by the National Weather Service72:
   a. “When thunder roars, go indoors.”
   b. “No place outside is safe when thunderstorms are in the area.”
   c. “Half an hour since thunder roars, now it’s safe to go outdoors!”

3. Stop practice or competition immediately and find a safer location when thunder is heard.16,67,73 (SOR: B; LOE: 2)

4. Identify the nearest appropriate and safe secure structure in the area.16,67,73 (SOR: B; LOE: 2)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIGHTNING PROCEDURE IMPLEMENTATION16,67–75

1. Components of a comprehensive lightning safety policy.16,67,69,74,75
   a. Guidelines for weather monitoring
   b. Protocol for lightning-strike prevention
   c. Proper emergency management of a lightning strike
   d. Education and training recommendations
   e. Criteria for cancellation and resumption of activity

2. Guidelines for successful weather monitoring16,73,75
   a. Instill and promote awareness about lightning and changing or unstable weather conditions and determine a reliable weather source.
   b. Establish a chain of command and identify the person(s) responsible for suspending activity.
   c. When appropriate, cancel or postpone activity before the event begins and prevent athletes or spectators from entering the venue.

3. Protocol for lightning-strike prevention16
   a. Promote lightning safety slogans such as “When thunder roars, go indoors.”
   b. Identify safe locations. A safe location is a fully enclosed building with wiring and plumbing or a fully enclosed vehicle, such as a school bus, car, or van.
   c. Identify and avoid unsafe locations, such as picnic or park shelters, tents, dugouts, press boxes, porches, open garages, and storage sheds. Tall objects such as trees, poles, towers, or other elevated areas are potential lightning targets and should also be avoided. Being inside a building with plumbing or wiring in close proximity to showers, sinks, locker rooms, indoor pool, appliances, and electronics connected to a power source can be unsafe.

4. Procedures for proper emergency management of a lightning strike16,71,72,75
   a. If an athlete or multiple athletes are struck by lightning, ensure your personal safety before assisting others.
   b. Carefully move the injured athlete(s) to a safer location, call 911 (activate EAP), and provide appropriate care within the scope of training, which may include CPR, AED use, and rescue breathing.
   c. Depending on the severity and number of athletes involved, provide care to those with the most life-threatening injuries while waiting for EMS to arrive.

5. Education recommendations16,73,75
   a. Member leaders and member coaches should be educated on proper prevention strategies and safe locations to use when lightning is in the area.
   b. Member leaders and member coaches should be educated on managing an athlete who is struck by lightning.
   c. Member leaders and member coaches should be educated as to when the event should be postponed because of lightning and when it is safe to resume activity.

6. Criteria for cancellation or resumption of activity16,67,73
   a. Postpone or suspend activities if a thunderstorm is expected before or during the event.
   b. Activities should be suspended until 30 minutes after the last strike of lightning is seen and the last sound of thunder is heard.
   c. The 30-minute clock restarts for each lightning flash within 6 miles (9.7 km) and each time thunder is heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDICAL SERVICES POLICIES

The Task Force agrees that member organizations should

1. Establish a plan to provide access to appropriate medical...
services such as athletic trainers or other emergency services for NGB-sponsored or -sanctioned events and events at which NGB staff are present. 5,15,55,76,77
2. Implement a plan to access appropriate and adequate medical services, such as athletic trainers or other emergency services, for activities including practices, competitions, and large-scale events (e.g., tournaments). 6,15,78,79

SUMMARY

This document is intended to serve as a call to action for all youth sport NGBs to provide support systems for member organizations through the education of league leaders and their members on the current policy and procedure best practices regarding EAPs, SCA, brain and neck injury, EHS, and other potentially threatening medical conditions (Appendix B). This document also discusses preexisting medical conditions, environmental conditions, and emergency medical care, such as athletic training services. The Task Force recognizes that each organization is unique and, therefore, will need to address policy and procedure recommendations differently to ensure the implementation of best practices. Furthermore, the Task Force recognizes that all best-practice policy and procedure recommendations may not be necessary for each sport (e.g., lightning policy for indoor sports). Many of the deaths in youth sports are preventable, and it is the goal of the Task Force to support youth sport NGBs in this mission of prevention.

DISCLAIMER

The National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) and this Inter-Association Task Force advise individuals, national youth sport governing bodies, staff, organization member leaders, member coaches, and member players to carefully and independently consider each of the recommendations. The information contained in these recommendations is neither exhaustive nor inclusive of all circumstances or individuals. Variables such as institutional human resource guidelines, state or federal statutes, rules, or regulations, as well as regional environmental conditions, may affect the relevance and implementation of these recommendations. The NATA and the Inter-Association Task Force advise their members and others to carefully and independently consider each of the recommendations (including the applicability of some to any particular circumstance or individual). The foregoing statement should not be relied upon as an independent basis for management and care but rather as a resource available to NATA members, national youth sport governing body members, and others. Moreover, no opinion is expressed herein regarding the quality of care that adheres to or differs from NATA’s position statements. The NATA and the Inter-Association Task Force reserve the right to rescind or modify their position statements at any time.

REFERENCES


Address correspondence to Robert A. Huggins, PhD, ATC, Department of Kinesiology, Korey Stringer Institute, University of Connecticut, 2095 Hillside Road, Box U-1110, Storrs, CT 06269. Address e-mail to robert.huggins@uconn.edu.
### Part 1. Overall Implementation Recommendations Checklist For National Governing Bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide assistance with the creation and development of EAPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide resources for appropriate emergency equipment and medical services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a training structure to provide education related to emergency health and safety best practices for all members, including but not limited to member leaders, member coaches, and parents or guardians of member athletes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Provide training modules or educational content on best practices for all members related to

- EAPs
- Sudden cardiac arrest
- Exertional heat stroke
- Brain and neck injury
- Preexisting medical conditions
- Environmental conditions
- Medical services

### Develop educational training and certification reporting system for member organizations and member coaches related to

- EAPs
- Sudden cardiac arrest
- Exertional heat stroke
- Brain and neck injury
- Preexisting medical conditions
- Environmental conditions
- Medical services
- Development of a reporting structure or system to monitor noncompliance
- Educational plan should be provided to train member organization leaders who, in turn, inform member coaches on how to organize and conduct EAP training

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**Part 2. Emergency Action Plan Policy Recommendations Checklist**[^1,7,16,19,57]

- Establish venue-specific EAPs
- Provide access to emergency equipment at each athletic venue as soon as possible
- Educate member coaches in recognizing emergency situations and factors that increase the risk for catastrophic injury or sudden death
- Review the general EAP annually or as needed

**Recommend training for member leaders and member coaches in**
- First aid and CPR
- Use of an AED

---

**Emergency Action Plan Procedure Checklist**

**Components of the EAP**
- Contact information for EMS and other pertinent emergency numbers
- Facility address, locations or maps (or both), specific directions, global positioning system coordinates
- Personnel names, contact information, and responsibilities
- Emergency equipment needs, including the specific location of each item
- Follow-up emergency documentation and reporting actions
- Components should be presented in a clear and logical manner with step-by-step directions for the individual(s) at the event or venue (ideally on 1 sheet of paper) with the assistance of the local EMS

**Outline the following in the procedures**
- How to establish efficient and effective communication
- Practice of EAP in concert with local EMS
- How to provide all member coaches and EMS with copies of the general EAP
- Posting of the EAP at each venue in an easily visible location (if possible)
- Activation of the EAP quickly and at the first sign of distress
- Alert of responders to the emergency and its location
- Alert of other individuals on-site to assist in guiding EMS to the scene
- Emergency equipment location and maintenance
- Location or plan to locate the nearest accessible AED and other emergency equipment
- On-site readiness checks of equipment and maintenance of emergency equipment on a regular basis (if applicable)
- Registration of the AED(s) according to local ordinances with local EMS
- Training and education for member leaders and member coaches on EAP
- Training sessions to educate member coaches on how to recognize life-threatening situations
- Documentation and submission of completed competencies and trainings (if required)

Appendix B. Continued from previous page.
### Part 3. Sudden Cardiac Arrest Policy Recommendations Checklist

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Develop a comprehensive cardiac emergency policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Recommend that athletes undergo cardiovascular screening before participating in sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>An AED should be on-site and readily available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Educate member leaders and member coaches on the proper steps for managing SCA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Sudden Cardiac Procedure Checklist

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Components of the cardiac policy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Cardiac-screening procedures (American Academy of Family Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics minimum standard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Procedures to properly manage SCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Emergency equipment (ie, AED) location and logistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Education, training, and/or certification recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Return-to-participation protocol</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedures for proper management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Prompt recognition of SCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Early activation of EMS via the EAP (ie, call 911)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Early CPR and retrieval and application of the AED (if shock is advised) for a witnessed collapse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Transportation to a hospital with advanced life-support capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✗</td>
<td>Emergency equipment location and logistics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If AED is on-site**

| ✗ | Apply AED (ideally within 1–3 minutes) |
| ✗ | AED is in a central location for large-scale events, especially for national governing board-sanctioned or -sponsored events |
| ✗ | For events located more than 3 minutes from an AED, a separate AED is available or a plan to obtain the nearest AED is identified |

**No AED on-site**

| ✗ | Continue CPR and life-support measures until either the athlete responds or EMS arrives |
| ✗ | If others are available to assist, begin 2-person CPR and life support |

#### Equipment required for rapid treatment

| ✗ | AED(s) (ideally within 1–3 minutes) |

**Education and training information for member leaders and member coaches**

| ✗ | Educate at least biannually about the location, function, and use of AEDs |
| ✗ | Educate on prompt recognition of SCA, early activation of EMS, early CPR and defibrillation, and transport of the athlete to the hospital |
| ✗ | Inform of proper clearance and return-to-participation procedures for an athlete who has experienced or is suffering from a cardiac-related condition |

#### Return-to-participation protocol

| ✗ | Youth athletes who experience cardiac problems should be evaluated by a physician before return-to-participation is considered |
| ✗ | A physician should discuss clearance decisions with the appropriate consultants and the parents or guardians to make prudent decisions |
| ✗ | Clearance for youth athletes with cardiac disorders should be based on physician recommendations |

**Appendix B. Continued from previous page.**

- Develop a comprehensive medical-management policy
- Educate on the brain and neck injury plan and policy
- Recommend the proper use, fit, and wear of protective equipment
- Advise that appropriate medical personnel direct the management of any athletes with head or neck injuries, including those who do not require emergency medical treatment
- Never permit member coaches to return an athlete to play who is suspected of having a head or neck injury, including concussion

### Brain and Neck Injury Procedure Checklist

#### Components of the brain and neck injury policy

- Procedures for management and care of patients with brain or neck injury
- Educational information related to the prevention, recognition, treatment, and return-to-play procedures for athletes with brain or neck injuries, including concussion
- Appropriate evaluation protocols for when medical personnel are and are not present
- Return-to-participation protocol

#### Procedures for proper management

- Activation of on-field care and management of the patient with a brain or neck injury
- The brain or neck injury plan should be implemented for an athlete who has collapsed after a witnessed or suspected hit to the head or neck

**Nonmedical personnel (eg, teammates, parents, game officials) on-site**

- Patient with a suspected brain or neck injury should not be touched or moved, and the EAP and EMS should be activated

**Appropriate medical personnel (ie, physician, athletic trainer, health care provider trained in brain and neck injuries) on-site**

- Patient with a suspected brain or neck injury should be properly stabilized under the direction of the medical personnel
- EMS should be activated and transfer procedures implemented
- If the brain or neck injury results in the patient’s loss of pulse or respiration, CPR should be initiated and an AED applied if appropriate

#### Educational and training information for member leaders and member coaches

- Prevention, recognition, and management of athletes with brain or neck injury
- The fact that helmets do not prevent concussions (only for helmeted sports)
- The importance of enforcing the rules of the sport and instruction on the safest techniques for player-to-player contact
- How to ensure the safety of the playing surface and surroundings (eg, boards, nets, posts, fences)
- Proper fit, wear, and maintenance of protective equipment specific to the sport
- Proper reconditioning and recertifying of equipment (when appropriate) based on manufacturer’s guidelines
- Education covering state laws related to concussion management and reporting

**Appropriate evaluation protocol (specifically concussions)**

**Appropriate medical personnel (licensed or certified health care provider trained in the assessment and diagnosis of brain-related injury) NOT on-site**

- The athlete should be removed from the activity and referred for medical evaluation
- An athlete with a suspected concussion or neck injury should be evaluated by an appropriate health care provider (not a member coach or parent unless medically qualified) and should not be returned to participation until medically cleared

**Appropriate medical personnel on-site**

- Evaluation for concussion at the discretion of the medical provider should be conducted
- The athlete may return to play after evaluation only if the trained medical professional deems it appropriate and clears the athlete
- Treatment recommendations for concussion should be provided, including educating the athlete and his/her parents on the need for cognitive and physical rest

**Return-to-participation protocol**

- Graduated return-to-participation progression
- An athlete returning to participation after a brain or neck injury is required to obtain written clearance from an appropriate medical provider
- Athlete should not advance to the next step unless he or she is symptom free at the current step and a minimum of 24 hours has elapsed between steps

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Appendix B. Continued from previous page.
### Part 5. Exertional Heat Stroke Policy Recommendations Checklist

- Procedures for a heat-acclimatization program and “how-to” guide in place before training for sport when applicable (eg, preseason in hot environments, non-climate-controlled conditions, or new environments in unfamiliar regions)
- Develop a medical management plan for the care of athletes with heat stroke
- Provide education for member leaders, coaches, athletes, parents, and staff on a periodic basis
- Develop a plan for assessing environmental conditions to prevent heat-related illnesses including heat stroke
- Return-to-play protocol

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### Exertional Heat Stroke Procedure Checklist

#### Components of the exertional heat stroke policy
- Guidelines for environmental monitoring
- Protocol for heat acclimatization
- Procedures for proper emergency management of exertional heat stroke
- Emergency equipment and logistics
- Return-to-play protocol

#### Procedures for proper environmental monitoring
- Monitor the environment using a wet-bulb globe temperature device, prediction chart, heat index, or information from a local weather station to assess if it is safe to exercise, practice, or play in the heat
- The threshold for activity modification should be determined using an on-site environmental monitor and geographic-specific guidelines

#### Procedures for proper management of exertional heat stroke
- Activate the on-field exertional heat-stroke care and management plan
- Athletes who demonstrate confusion, nausea, dizziness, altered consciousness, or combativeness; other unusual behavior; or stagger during walking or running or collapse while exercising should be suspected of having a heat-related injury

**For the athlete who has collapsed or is unresponsive but is breathing and has a heartbeat**
- Immediate cooling via cold-water immersion in a tub of ice water or the rotation of ice towels over the entire body should be implemented while calling 911
- Excess clothing and equipment should be removed from the athlete to help with the dissipation of heat
- During cooling, the athlete should be moved from direct sunlight into shade if possible

**Appropriate medical personnel NOT on-site**
- Call 911 (activate EAP) while simultaneously pursing rapid cooling
- Until medical personnel arrive, continue to cool and monitor the athlete

**Appropriate medical personnel (physician, athletic trainer, or other medical personnel trained in heat illnesses) and equipment (eg, rectal thermometer, cold tub, tarp, kiddie pool, shower, access to water and ice, towels) are on-site**
- “Cool first, transport second” should be implemented
- Cooling should continue uninterrupted until the athlete’s core body temperature is less than 102°F (38.9°C)

#### Equipment required for rapid cooling an body temperature assessment
- Large tub, plastic tarp, kiddie pool, or empty trash barrel are options for holding ice and water for the athlete who needs rapid and immediate cooling
- Water source, extra water cooler(s), access to a locker room with shower, ice chest(s), and towels or sheets are recommended to assist in the rapid cooling of the athlete
- Rectal thermometer (for use by medical personnel only); all other on-field temperature-assessment techniques (mouth, ear, forehead, armpit) are inaccurate

#### Education information for member leaders and member coaches
- Educate regarding the factors that place athletes at risk and strategies to prevent heat illness
- Educate on the prompt recognition of exertional heat stroke, activation of EMS, importance of immediate cooling, and transport of the athlete to the hospital
- Inform about proper clearance of and return-to-participation procedures for an athlete who has experienced exertional heat stroke

#### Return to participation
- Graduated return-to-participation progression tailored for the severity of the heat-related illness by an appropriate medical provider
- Required to obtain written clearance from an appropriate medical provider specifically trained in heat illness
### Part 6. Potentially Life-Threatening Medical Conditions Policy Recommendations Checklist

- Education on disclosing potentially life-threatening medical conditions (eg, asthma, anaphylaxis, sickle cell trait, diabetes, epilepsy) to member coaches
- Encourage parents or guardians to disclose member athletes’ potentially life-threatening medical conditions
- Parents should provide the child with appropriate self-administering medication (eg, inhaler, epinephrine injector) as indicated by the child’s physician

### Potentially Life-Threatening Medical Conditions Procedure Checklist

#### Components of the life-threatening medical conditions policy
- Procedures for proper management of these potential medical conditions
- Educational information related to the prevention, recognition, treatment, and return-to-play procedures
- Communications plan

#### Procedures for proper management of a potentially life-threatening asthma attack

**Medication NOT on-site**
- Activate EMS (activate EAP and call 911) immediately

**Appropriate medical personnel NOT on-site**
- Retrieve the athlete’s medication (eg, inhaler) and provide to the athlete for self-administration
- Successful administration of the medication requires the athlete to remain calm and concentrate on breathing correctly
- If requested by the athlete, other individuals may assist with administration of the inhaler
- If no improvement occurs in 5 minutes, activate EMS (activate EAP and call 911) immediately

**Appropriate medical personnel on-site**
- Retrieve the athlete’s medication and assist in the proper administration of the medication.
- The athlete should be monitored by a medical professional knowledgeable in asthma emergencies until breathing returns to normal, and follow-up or referral should be at the discretion of the medical provider

#### Procedures for proper management of a potentially life-threatening anaphylactic reaction

**Medication NOT on-site**
- Activate EMS (activate EAP and call 911) immediately

**Personnel (medical or nonmedical)**
- Simultaneously call 911 (and activate the EAP) while retrieving the athlete’s medication (eg, epinephrine injector)
- Provide the medication to the athlete for immediate self-administration in the thigh
- Give the injector to EMS when they arrive
- Follow state laws pertaining to administration of life-saving medications and Good Samaritan laws
- After the anaphylactic reaction is treated with epinephrine injection, transport to the hospital

**Education information for member leaders and member coaches**
- Educate on the major signs and symptoms of asthma, such as shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness, and recurrent coughing
- Educate on the major signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis, such as quickly developing rash, hives, swollen lips or tongue, shortness of breath, wheezing, reduced blood pressure, and fainting or collapsing after being exposed to a likely or known allergen for the athlete

**Communication plan**
- Complete form to disclose all known medical conditions that includes a treatment plan, medications used, and who is responsible for ensuring medication are present during practices and competitions
- Education of parents and guardians of dangers of not disclosing life-threatening conditions

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Appendix B. Continued from previous page.
### Part 7. Lightning Policy Recommendations Checklist

- Create and enforce a comprehensive lightning safety policy
- Enforce “when thunder roars, go indoors”
- Identify the nearest appropriate and safe shelters in the EAP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lightning Procedure Checklist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Components of the lightning policy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Communication guidelines for weather monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Protocol for lightning-strike prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Procedures for proper emergency management of lightning strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Criteria for resumption of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication guidelines for weather monitoring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Establish a chain of command and identify the person(s) responsible for suspending activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Instill and promote awareness about lightning and changing or unstable weather conditions and determine a reliable weather source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ When appropriate, cancel or postpone activity before the event begins and prevent athletes or spectators from entering the venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedures for lightning strike prevention</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Promote lightning safety slogans, such as “when thunder roars, go indoors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Identify safe locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Identify and avoid unsafe locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedures for lightning strike management</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ If an athlete or multiple athletes are struck by lightning, ensure your personal safety before assisting others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Carefully move the injured athlete(s) to a safer location, and call 911 (activate EAP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Provide appropriate care within the scope of training, which may include CPR and AED use and rescue breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Depending on the number of athletes involved and the severity of injury, provide care to those with the most life-threatening injuries while waiting for EMS to arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education information for member leaders and member coaches</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Educate on proper prevention strategies and safe locations when lightning is in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Educate on managing an athlete who is struck by lightning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Educate as to when the event should be postponed due to lightning and when it is safe to resume activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria for cancellation or resumption of activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Postpone or suspend activities if a thunderstorm is expected before or during the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Activities should be suspended until 30 minutes after the last strike of lightning is seen and the last sound of thunder is heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ The 30-minute clock restarts for each lightning flash within 6 miles (9.7 km) and each time thunder is heard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B. Continued from previous page.