

# Concussion Management in Community Rugby: **2026**

The '*Concussion Management in Community Rugby: 2026*' document is the primary concussion management resource for Provincial Unions (PUs), offering key points and essential information for the community game in 2026.

PUs are encouraged to share relevant information from this document with their clubs and schools and refer to it when addressing concussion-related matters.

\*It is recommended to access this document online to ensure you have the latest links to forms and resources.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

New Zealand Rugby (NZR) is committed to player safety through education, prevention, and best-practice management. We follow World Rugby's Concussion Guidance and align with ACC's Concussion in Sport Guidelines to ensure the highest standards of care. This document is intended for Provincial Unions and is **not a medical guide**. This document outlines best practices for reporting and managing concussion in community rugby, ensuring a safe and inclusive game where player welfare comes first. Key protocols include the immediate removal of players with a suspected or confirmed concussion, standardised treatment, and stand-down periods with medical clearance before returning to play.

Everyone in community rugby shares responsibility for recognising and supporting the management of concussion. This document establishes the default concussion management procedures, superseding previous guidelines.

For medical advice, please refer to medical doctors and appropriately trained healthcare practitioners.

## 2. CONCUSSION REPORTING OVERVIEW

Timely and accurate reporting is essential. If an injury is not reported, appropriate support and player management cannot be provided.

All concussions and suspected concussions must be reported through both Rugby Xplorer (RX) and the NZR Concussion Notification Form.

- **RX** is used to manage the player (stand-down, medical clearance, eligibility to play)
- **NZR Concussion Notification Form** (available on the [NZR website](#)) is used to ensure consistent player support, communication, and data capture

The reporting pathway differs depending on whether the concussion is identified via a Blue Card or through other means; however, both reporting steps are required in all cases.

A player issued a Blue Card must not return to play until medical clearance has been obtained and recorded in Rugby Xplorer.

For all other concussions, NZR strongly recommends medical assessment and clearance to support a safe return to play.

### BLUE CARD (Referee Issued)



#### During Match

- Referee Issues Blue Card
- Player removed from play

#### RX Team Admin

- Enter Blue Card in RX Match Day App
- Competition Case created in RX

#### Provincial Union Responsibilities

- Review Competition Case
- Contact player / team if required
- Complete Concussion Notification Form
- Apply min 21-day stand-down in RX

#### Return to Play

- Medical clearance **required**
- PU enters medical clearance date in RX Competition Case
- Player eligible for selection



### All Other Concussions

#### Suspected Concussion Occurs

- Manager, Physio, Team Medic, Coach, School, whānau, or player enters form

#### Report Submitted

- Concussion Notification Form completed
- Player (and parent) receives concussion education email

#### Provincial Union Responsibilities

- Create Competition Case in RX
- Apply min 21-day stand-down in RX

#### Return to Play

- Medical clearance **strongly recommended**
- PU enters medical clearance date in RX Competition Case
- Player eligible for selection

## 3. BLUE CARD

### 3.1 Background Information

The introduction of the Blue Card Concussion Initiative was the result of a trial conducted by Northland Rugby Union in 2014. NZR has since then supported the roll out of the Blue Card across New Zealand Provincial Unions (PUs). In grades that use the Blue Card system, referees have the authority to issue a Blue Card during a match to any player who exhibits signs of a concussion or suspected concussion. The player must then stand-down for a minimum of 21 days and follow NZR's Graduated Return-to-Play Protocol, including obtaining medical clearance.

### 3.2 Reporting Systems – Referees / Team Managers

During a match, the referee may issue a Blue Card. It is the responsibility of the Rugby Xplorer (RX) Team Admin to report a Blue Card in the RX Rugby Match Day App, with each Team Admin handling their own team's scoring and reporting (See [Scoring in Match Day App](#)). This includes reporting Red, Yellow and Blue Cards, Match Forfeits, and Match Disputes. Once submitted, this creates a [Competition Case](#) which is sent to the PU Competition Manager for review.

For RX Team Admins:

- When entering Blue Card/ Concussions select the role of the player and injury cause.
- Before you click 'End Game', ensure you have confirmed the scores and cards entered with the opposing team admin and referee.

For Referees:

- Confirm with RX Team admins at end of game that the Blue Card has been entered.

### 3.3 Education for Referees

RugbySmart (NZR led Injury Prevention Education for Coaches & Referees) covers education on the Four R's of Concussion Management: Recognise, Remove, Recover, and Return. The first two R's, Recognise and Remove are especially important for referees to feel comfortable with.

If Referees are looking for further education, the Recognise and Remove learning module is available here: [Concussion module: Recognise & Remove - Referee Blue Card](#)

### 3.4 Laws and DSLVs Relating to Blue Card

The following laws are related to removal from play after a concussion / suspected concussion event:

#### **World Rugby Law 3.24**

If, at any point during a match, a player is concussed or has suspected concussion, that player must be immediately and permanently removed from the playing area. This process is known as "Recognise and Remove".

## New Zealand Rugby Domestic Variation Law 22.d

PERMANENT REPLACEMENT (THE REFEREE'S POWER TO STOP AN INJURED PLAYER FROM CONTINUING)

22.d If the referee believes a player has been concussed or suspects a player has been concussed, the referee must order that player to leave the playing area. That player must not return and play in that match. PERMANENT REPLACEMENT – RECOGNISE AND REMOVE

24. Without limiting 22.d above, in grades in which Blue Card Concussion Initiatives apply, 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 for a Graduated Return to Play, as set out in the protocols applicable to the Blue Card Concussion Initiative. Full details of the protocols can be found in the NZR Booklet titled 'Concussion Management in Community Rugby: (corresponding year)'.

NZR DSLV Document: [2026 DSLV Document](#)

### 3.5 Reporting Requirements for Provincial Unions to NZR

Provincial Unions are responsible for ensuring that all concussions are recorded in both Rugby Explorer (RX) and the NZR Concussion Notification Form.

For Blue Card incidents submitted through the RX Match Day App, a Competition Case will be automatically created in RX. Provincial Unions must:

- Review the Competition Case
- Complete the NZR Concussion Notification Form using the available information
- Follow up with the player, coach, or team management if further information is required

For concussions identified outside of the Blue Card process, Provincial Unions must ensure:

- A Concussion Notification Form is completed
- A Competition Case is created in RX

#### Why is this important?

Centralising reporting through one form ensures:

1. **Immediate Player Guidance** – Players receive timely support and next steps.
2. **Clear Communication & Record-Keeping** – A structured paper trail reduces follow up and duplication.
3. **Consistent, Standardised Reporting** – Enables improved insights across all Provincial Unions.

In turn, NZR will provide Provincial Unions with insights based on the data, helping to improve player welfare and injury management across all levels of the game.

## End-of-Year Reporting

Provincial Unions are not required to submit a separate end-of-year register of Blue Cards, provided all concussions have been reported using the NZR Concussion Notification Form.

Data submitted through the NZR Concussion Notification Form is captured centrally, providing a complete record of concussion events and supporting consistent reporting, player management, and insights across all Provincial Unions.

Where Provincial Unions are using alternative reporting processes, an end-of-year register must be submitted to [concussion@nzrugby.co.nz](mailto:concussion@nzrugby.co.nz) to ensure all concussion events are captured. Provincial Unions are encouraged to use the NZR Concussion Notification Form to streamline reporting and avoid additional end-of-year requirements.

### 3.6 Rescinding a Blue Card

Occasionally, a Blue Card may be issued in error, and a review process exists to address such cases. However, due to the importance of player safety, the threshold for rescinding a Blue Card is set very high. It must be proven that the Referee had no reasonable basis to suspect a concussion. If any doubt exists, NZR will err on the side of caution and the decision will stand to prioritise player welfare. Provincial Union data shows that incorrect Blue Card decisions are rare, so reviews are expected to be infrequent.

#### **Review Process:**

If a player, coach, or club believes a Blue Card was issued incorrectly, they must follow these steps:

#### **Initial Discussion:**

Upon receiving notification from the Provincial Union (PU) Blue Card Administrator, the player should consult with their club and review the Graduated Return to Play (G RTP) guidelines.

#### **Evidence Gathering:**

If they still believe the card was issued in error, they must compile relevant information, including:

- Team management and Referee accounts.
- Video footage (if available).
- Supporting medical reports or records (e.g. Medical certificate, GP medical notes with assessments completed).
- Any other information that may be felt to be of value.

#### **Submission:**

The compiled information must be sent via the PU Blue Card Administrator to the NZR concussion email address ([concussion@nzrugby.co.nz](mailto:concussion@nzrugby.co.nz)) within 48 hours of the card being issued.

*Then, the following will take place:*

**NZR Assessment:**

If NZR determines there are no grounds for review, the decision will stand.

If further assessment is warranted, NZR may direct the player to seek an opinion from an independent specialist.

**Potential Independent Specialist Review:**

If the specialist confirms no concussion occurred, NZR may rescind the Blue Card.

If concussion is confirmed or suspected, the card will remain in effect.

**Final Decision made:**

The outcome will be communicated to the PU Blue Card Administrator.

***Additional Notes:***

- *A rescinded Blue Card does not imply the initial decision was incorrect, as on-field calls prioritise player safety.*
- *NZR's decision is final; no further appeal is allowed.*
- *The review process may take time and could extend beyond the mandatory stand-down period.*
- *Any costs associated with the further assessment of a Blue Card will be at the expense of the player or their club.*

### **3.7 Support with Medical Costs**

If a Blue Card has been issued, NZR can provide funding for up to three concussion-related medical appointments. Coverage is limited to consultations with a medical doctor (General Practitioner (GP) or Sport and Exercise Physician), nurse practitioner or a physiotherapist. The recommended allocation is two visits to a medical doctor and one visit to a physiotherapist.

Medical clearance for return to play **must** be completed by a medical doctor (GP, Sport and Exercise Physician, or nurse practitioner).

#### **Reimbursement to Provincial Union (PU)**

- The PU may submit the player's receipts to NZR for reimbursement, **or**
- If the PU has already covered the cost, the PU may invoice NZR for reimbursement.

[Download the Blue Card Expense Claim form \(PDF\)](#)

***Additional notes:***

- *NZR processes reimbursements **once per month**, with payments made on the **20th of each month**.*
- *Receipts and expense claims must be received **no later than the 1st of the month** to be processed for payment on the **20th of the same month**.*
- *Ensure all receipts are included.*

## 4. COMMUNITY CONCUSSION NOTIFICATION FORM

### 4.1 Background Information

NZR encourages the reporting of all concussions and suspected concussions, including those not identified through the Blue Card process. This reinforces the principle that everyone has a role to play in recognising and supporting players with concussion.

Coaches, players, team management, whānau members, and sideline supporters can submit reports, provided the player is aware. Once a report is submitted, the player will automatically receive concussion education via email, and the details of the person submitting the report will be recorded.

NZR recommends that players reported through this form follow the minimum 21-day stand-down period and adhere to the NZR Graduated Return to Play Protocol.

All reports are taken seriously, and we encourage responsible reporting. False or misleading reports should be avoided.

### 4.2 Reporting Systems (Community Concussion Notification Form)

Concussions that are not identified through the Blue Card process should be reported using the [NZR Concussion Notification Form](#) and recorded in Rugby Xplorer (RX). Provincial Unions must ensure a Competition Case is created in RX and the appropriate stand-down and medical clearance is applied.

Provincial Unions have access to a backend spreadsheet through SmartSheet, where all concussions submitted through the 'Community Concussion Notification Form' are recorded. This can be used to:

- Track the minimum 21-day stand-down (and extended stand-down if the player is still experiencing symptoms)
- Monitor medical clearance and return-to-play status

If your Provincial Union has not yet been onboarded, please contact NZR at [concussion@nzrugby.co.nz](mailto:concussion@nzrugby.co.nz).

## 5. CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT

A structured, symptom-guided recovery plan can help facilitate concussion recovery, ensuring a safe and gradual return to daily life, school, work and rugby.

Regardless of whether a Blue Card is issued or not, best practice is for all players with a concussion or suspected concussion to:

- See a medical doctor to confirm the diagnosis and lodge an ACC claim
- Follow the Graduated Return to Play (GRTP) protocol
- Obtain further medical clearance from a doctor before returning to contact

## 5.1 NZR Graduated Return to Learn/Work Protocol (GRTL/W)

[Click to view](#)

## 5.2 NZR Graduated Return to Play Protocol (GRTP)

[Click to view](#)

Players who take longer to progress through their GRTP, especially those struggling to return to school or work, should be assessed by a medical doctor.

# 6. SERIOUS INJURY

## 6.1 Background Information

New Zealand Rugby is always focused on eliminating 'serious injuries' from the game. Serious injuries are those that have the potential to result in any type of permanent disablement to players and we want injuries to be reported ASAP to ensure the best support is offered to the players and their whanau. All serious injuries need to be reported.

It is the responsibility of the team coach, manager, or designated 'Injury Officer' to ensure that any serious injuries are reported. Please remember that the injury forms you complete and return help NZR plan strategies that will reduce the impact injuries have on your team. They also enable proper management of injuries, to ensure that seriously injured players are looked after as effectively as possible.

Each time a serious injury occurs, and the Serious Injury Reporting form is filled in, the New Zealand Rugby Foundation (NZRF), the player's Provincial Union, and NZR are notified via email. NZRF and NZR will be the point of contact for the family, and we will keep the relevant Provincial Union Serious Injury contact person updated.

It's important that all serious injuries are reported immediately to ensure co-ordinated support to the injured player and their whanau, and communications support to all affected parties.

## 6.2 Serious Injury Reporting

Although concussion may not always meet the threshold for serious injury reporting, when it does, a Serious Injury Notification form must be completed on the NZR website. Additionally, if necessary, both a Serious Injury and a Concussion Notification form may be completed.

The definition of a 'Serious Injury' includes one or a combination of the following:

- A head or spinal injury that results in the player being admitted to hospital
- An injury or medical event (e.g. a heart attack) that results in the death of a player during match play or rugby training
- An injury that is expected to result in some permanent disability (e.g. loss of use of a limb, loss of an eye).

If the injury meets this threshold, then this [Serious Injury Notification form](#) must be completed on the NZR website.

## 7. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [ACC Concussion in Sport Guidelines](#)
- [ACC Concussion Service Providers](#)
- International Concussion Screening Tools:
  - [SCAT 6](#)
  - [Child SCAT 6](#)
  - [CRT 6](#)
- [International Consensus Statement on Concussion in Sport](#)
- [New Zealand Rugby Concussion Resources](#)
- [NZR Concussion Education Learning Modules:](#)
  - Recognise & Remove in Community Rugby
  - Referee Blue Card

*For any further information or **non-urgent** inquiries, please contact NZR by email at [concussion@nzrugby.co.nz](mailto:concussion@nzrugby.co.nz).*

**Note:** NZR is currently involved in pilot programmes and trialling new processes in selected environments. In these cases, concussion management and reporting processes may vary, with appropriate oversight and approval from NZR.

### **NB: Concussion Management at the Professional Level:**

At the professional level, concussion management operates differently to the community game. There is a comprehensive process for assessing and managing players with a suspected concussion via the World Rugby Head Injury Assessment (HIA) Protocol, which includes:

- Baseline SCAT-6, neurocognitive tests, and concussion risk stratification analysis
- The Head Injury Assessment (HIA) Protocol with testing at three different time points
  - HIA 1 (in game), 2 (immediately post-match) and 3 (after two sleeps)
- Video review during matches
- Independent match day doctors
- Instrumented mouthguards
- An on-site medical team with expertise in concussion to manage the player and their return-to-play process daily
- Specialist review with an Independent Concussion Consultant (ICC) accredited by World Rugby, in some cases
- Onward referral for further specialist assessment, investigation or treatment with an expert in brain health & concussion as needed.

We note that even with these processes in place, most professional players with a suspected concussion have a stand-down period of at least 12 days.