

SCOTTISH FA HEADING GUIDELINES FAQS

Q. Why have the guidelines been introduced?

A. The recently published FIELD study carried out by the University of Glasgow found a significant increase in the incidence of neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia in former Scottish professional footballers. It also showed an improvement in life expectancy up to age 70 and a reduction in other common diseases such as heart disease and lung cancer. The study was not designed to and therefore, could not identify specific causative factors such as heading or head injury. However, the Scottish FA believes that player welfare, especially of young players, is paramount and has collaborated with colleagues to produce some pragmatic guidelines designed to help coaches remove repetitive and unnecessary heading from youth football in the earliest years, with a phased introduction at an age group considered most appropriate by our medical experts.

Q. What research currently exists around heading burden?

A. There have been a number of studies carried out across Europe in the last year. These studies are available through contacting Doctor John MacLean at Hampden Sports Medicine Centre via John.MacLean@hampdensportsclinic.com.

Q. What if a header occurs during play in a children's football game?

A. Coaches should encourage dribbling, passing, combination play and fundamental movement skills, however, on rare occasions heading may happen. These situations should not be penalised and play continues as normal. In game formats such as 7-a-side, coaches should ensure the application of the additional guidance related to short corners, short free-kicks and the use of the retreating line to play through the thirds.

Q. What should I do if I see poor practice in relation to the heading guidelines?

A. Whilst the Scottish FA and Affiliated National Associations will do as much as possible to promote the guidelines it may be necessary to re-emphasise the information set out. Where poor practice continues to be observed this should be reported to the relevant Affiliated National Association (i.e Scottish Youth Football Association).

Q. Where can I learn more about how to introduce young players to heading?

A. The Scottish FA deliver a comprehensive coach education programme for coaches working at all ages and stages of the game and will provide technical information for coaches on how to deal with heading practice through these courses. Information on these courses can be [found here](#).

Q. Will neck strengthening exercises help?

A. Recent scientific evidence has demonstrated that neck strengthening exercises might be beneficial in heading drills. Techniques on how to teach neck strengthening exercises will be under consideration as we continually review how best to support the game. For example, it could form part of coach development programmes in the future, however, more work is required in this area before we are able to provide any further guidance.

Q. What happens if players receive a knock to the head?

A. There are clear concussion guidelines set out through the Scottish Sport Concussion Guidelines 'IF IN DOUBT, SIT THEM OUT'. Coaches, leaders, volunteers and parents should ensure they are familiar with these. In any situation where there is doubt, players should be removed from the pitch. Information is available by [following this link](#).

Q. Will the Scottish FA monitor the effect of the new guidelines?

A. Yes, the Scottish FA will do this in conjunction with Affiliated National Associations and other key football stakeholders including the Hampden Sports Clinic. We will monitor the effectiveness of the guidelines and review and update on an annual basis.