

Feb. 2011 AANS Neurosurgeon
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How to get involved in concussion prevention in your community

Sports-related concussions have featured prominently in the news over recent months and many neurosurgeons are eager to take on a larger role in head and spine injury prevention efforts. There are several ways to get involved.

Education: One of the best ways for neurosurgeons to get involved in prevention is to start a ThinkFirst chapter. Founded in 1986 by the AANS and CNS, ThinkFirst works through local chapters supported by neurosurgical practices or hospitals. Sponsoring neurosurgeons and chapter directors, who are usually nurses or practice administrators, provide educational programs that teach pertinent anatomy, physiology and safety behaviors to local elementary and high schools. ThinkFirst chapters solicit and respond to requests for information from community leaders, including coaches and athletic directors, school principals and nurses. Reaching over 500,000 students in North America each year, award-winning Think First programs have garnered the Presidential Citation and AMA Adolescent Health Award for Excellence in Education and Prevention. These programs are considered best practice in community based injury prevention strategies, and will be featured at the Opening Reception on April 10, 2011 at the AANS Annual Meeting in Denver.

Philanthropy: Many neurosurgical groups, from small practices to state-wide societies, sponsor helmet give-aways. These programs focus on cycling injuries, which are the leading cause of sports-related head injuries in the United States, totally approximately 70,000/year. In the U.S., a child dies every day from a bike-related accident; studies show that only ¼ of children wear helmets as often as ¾ of the time they spend biking. Youth who receive helmets in such give-away programs learn that over 80% of biking-related head injuries can be eliminated by the use of a helmet.

Policy: Many neurosurgeons are joining NFL commissioner, Robert Liddell, in support of the Lystedt Law, and working to get it passed in all 50 states. Named for Zackery Lystedt, a Washington state football player who was injured at age 13 when he returned to play too soon after a concussion, this law would prevent any youth player suspected of a concussion from returning to play until examined by a professional.

For further information, please consult the following useful websites:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/>
- <http://www.usafootball.com/>
- <http://www.impacttest.com/>
- http://www.tbiwashington.org/tbi_wa/bill1824.shtml
- <http://www.thinkfirst.org>