Report to the Legislature

# Student Head Injuries Report

**OCTOBER 2026**

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Prepared by
Prevention and Community
Health Division

Washington State Department of HEALTH

DOH 140-273 October 2026

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# Overview

Concussions are a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a blow or jolt to the head or body that disrupts the way the brain normally works. All concussions are serious, and continuing to engage in activity with one can make the injury worse. People who return to activities too soon after a concussion risk getting another concussion and permanent disability. Schools play a key role in noticing and responding properly to concussions when they happen.

State law requires public schools to report diagnosed concussions among students (Pre-K through 12th grade) to the Department of Health (DOH) when they happen during school-based activities, including athletics.

1,098,219 students were enrolled in Washington public schools during the 2025-26 school year across 295 school districts. A total of 127 school districts reported one or more student concussion.

**DOH received 1,161 concussion reports from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026. This is 174 fewer reported concussions than the 2024-25 school year.**

Additionally, schools report 468 student concussions that:

- occurred outside of school activities
- could not be confirmed or were not confirmed by a licensed health care provider
- occurred at other schools outside Washington's public school system.

These injuries are not required to be reported but are important when considering the broader impact of youth concussions. Limitations exist in current reporting, and the true impact may be larger than the data suggests. The data in this report represents only one source of data for youth head injuries in Washington. Other data sources on this topic may exist.

Due to the state's constrained budget conditions, this report has been abbreviated.

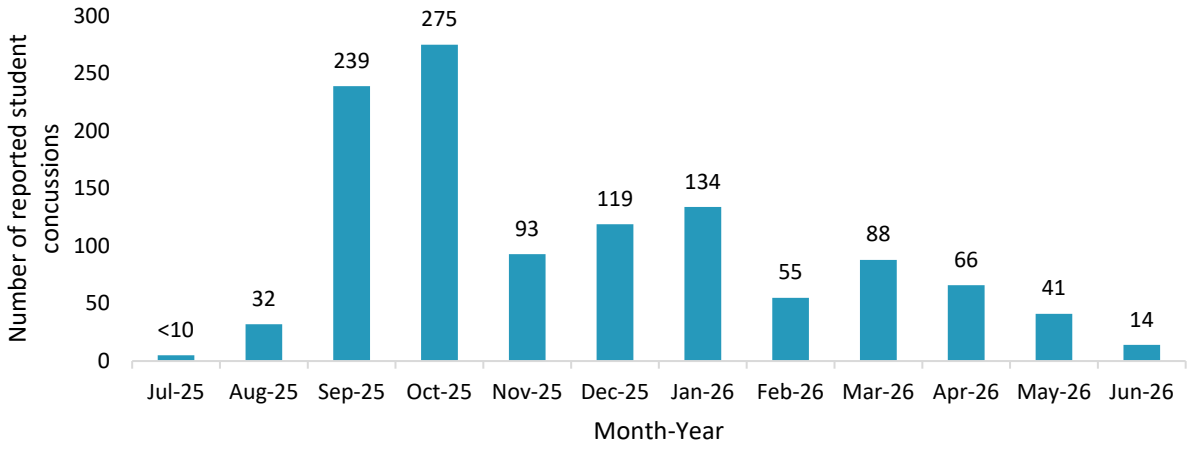
# Student Head Injury Data

## Time and Cause of Reported Injuries

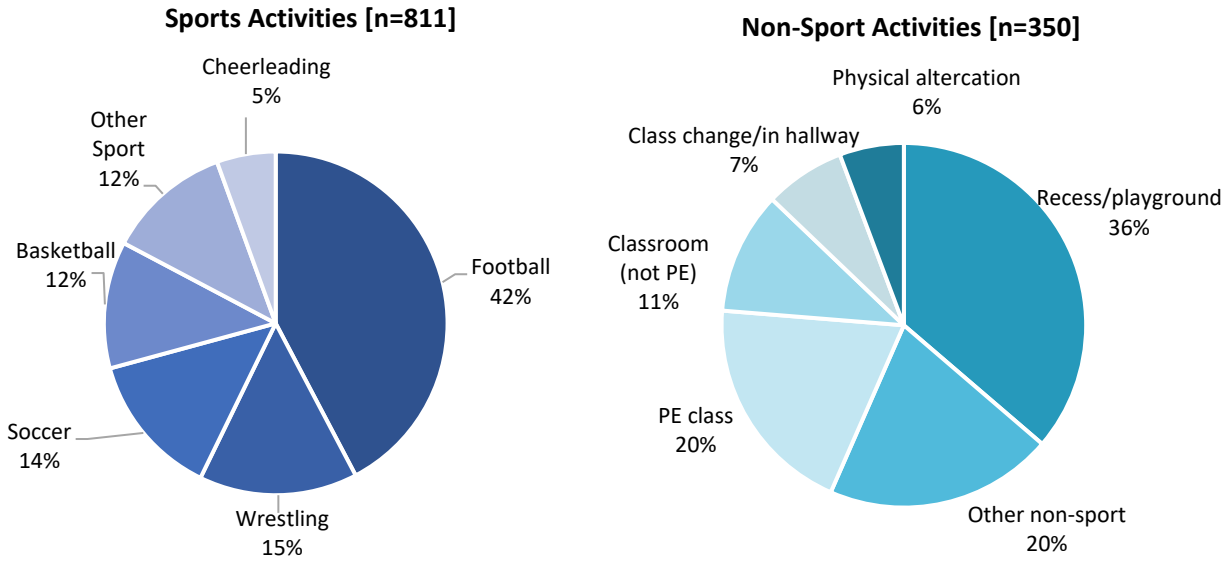
For the 2025-26 school year, most reported concussions happened in September and October, which is consistent with previous years of data collection.

70% of reported concussions were sports related. Of sports-related injuries, 42% happened during football, 15% happened during wrestling, and 14 % happened during soccer. This highlights an ongoing trend over the years of reporting: football continues to be the leading cause of reported concussions across all sports and non-sports activities.

## Figure 1: Number of Reported Injuries by Month




## Figure 2: Cause of Reported Injuries



Additional data about time and cause of reported injuries includes:

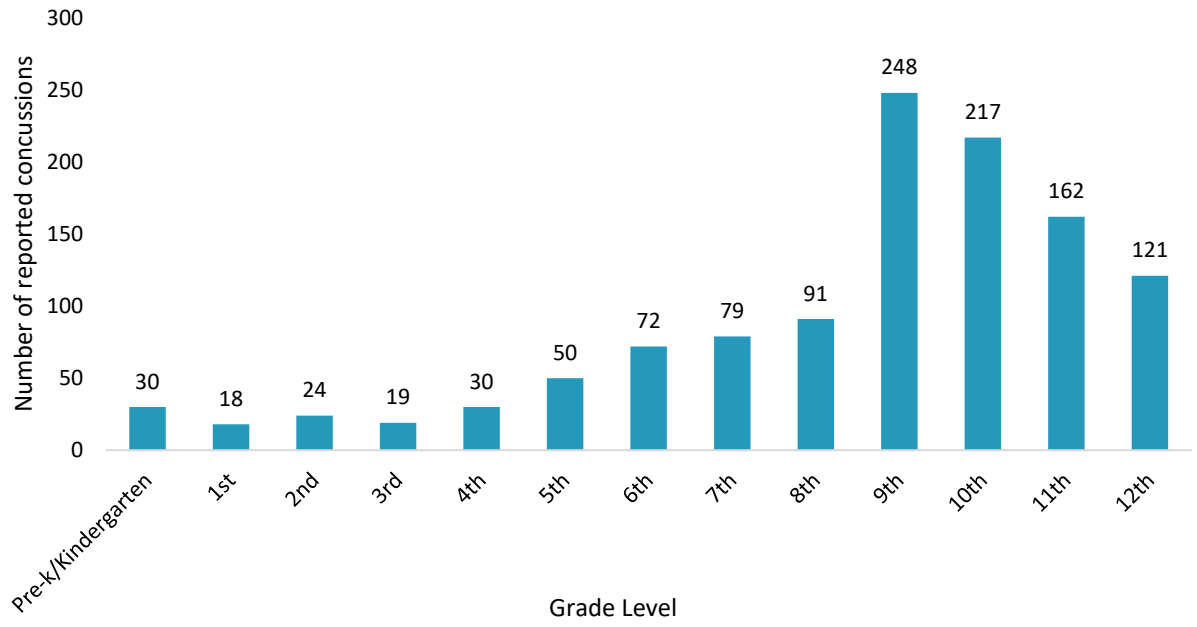
- 42% of students who got their concussions during sports were wearing protective head equipment at the time.
- 457 (39%) of reported concussions happened during games or competitions and 303 (26%) during practice.
- Most concussions took place on outdoor fields or courses (46%), indoor gyms or training rooms (32%), or playgrounds (9%), which is consistent with prior years.

## Student Demographics

Most reported concussions (65%) happened among high school students, with a large percentage in grades 9 and 10. This has been a consistent trend for four reporting years. While most concussions occur among high school students in contact sports, injuries are reported across all grade levels.

Also in line with previous years, male students had the most reported concussions (61% compared to 39% occurring among female students).

## Figure 3: Number of Reported Injuries by Grade



## Table 1: Demographics of Students with Reported Injuries

| Demographics by age, grade level, sex, and race/ethnicity | Non-sport Activity | | Sports Activity | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Count | Percent | Count | Percent | Count | Percent |
| **Age Group** | | | | | | |
| 4-10 | 136 | 39% | 18 | 2% | 154 | 13% |
| 11-13 | 106 | 30% | 104 | 13% | 210 | 18% |
| 14-18 | 108 | 31% | 689 | 85% | 797 | 69% |
| | | | | | | |
| **Grade Level** | | | | | | |
| Elementary School (Pre-K-5th grade) | 153 | 44% | 18 | 2% | 171 | 14% |
| Middle School (6th-8th grade) | 112 | 32% | 130 | 16% | 242 | 20% |
| High School (9th-12th grade) | 85 | 24% | 663 | 82% | 748 | 65% |
| | | | | | | |
| **Sex at Birth** | | | | | | |
| Female | 157 | 45% | 296 | 36% | 453 | 39% |
| Male | 193 | 55% | 515 | 64% | 708 | 61% |
| | | | | | | |
| **Race/Ethnicity** | | | | | | |
| American Indian/Alaska Native* | <10 | ** | 13 | 2% | 21 | 2% |
| Asian* | 16 | 5% | 31 | 4% | 47 | 4% |
| Black* | 17 | 5% | 41 | 5% | 58 | 5% |
| Hispanic | 52 | 15% | 73 | 9% | 125 | 11% |
| Multiracial* | 17 | 5% | 26 | 3% | 43 | 4% |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander* | <10 | ** | <10 | ** | 11 | 1% |
| White* | 155 | 44% | 329 | 41% | 484 | 41% |
| Other Race | <10 | ** | <10 | ** | <10 | ** |
| Unknown | 81 | 23% | 287 | 35% | 368 | 33% |
| | | | | | | |
| **Total** | **350** | | **811** | | | |

*Note: The lowest reported age was 4 years old*

**Non-Hispanic*

*** DOH requires small number suppression for counts between 1 and 9. The percentages associated with the small numbers are also suppressed.*

## Return to Activity

Of the reported concussions for the 2025-26 school year:

- 68% of students were removed from the activity or sport at the time of injury, about the same as in 2024-25 (69%).
- 65% of students were authorized to return by the end of the sports season, with 60% of students actually returning.
- Students typically returned to athletic activity within 14 days of the injury.

## Academic Impacts

Students who experienced concussions faced notable impacts on their academics. Of the reported cases:

- 32% received a modified instructional plan during recovery (such as an IEP, 504, or other informal student-teacher in-classroom contract/agreement). Of these students, 81% returned to their usual learning environment. 19% of these students still required some level of modification because of their injury by the end of the school term.
- 47% did not receive any classroom modifications, such as changes to expectations or pace of instruction.
- Most students returned to their pre-injury learning environment within 7 days. This is about the same as last year, when most students returned to their pre-injury learning environment within 8 days.

# Data Limitations

DOH works with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and school districts to meet reporting compliance and quality goals. However, limitations continue to exist. It is difficult to distinguish if the decrease in reported concussions for the 2025-26 school year is due to fewer concussions, or because of other limitations such as school staff changes (capacity, turnover, etc.) and reporting system barriers.

State law requires schools to report diagnosed concussions by a licensed health care provider, and concussions without a diagnosis may be underreported. For example, a student may show symptoms of a concussion, but if the family does not seek medical care, the injury may never be reported.

Injuries that happen during recreational and club sports outside of school are not required to be reported. For example, youth in grades Kindergarten-eighth often play football in recreational leagues until high school; however, injuries that happen during that time are not required to be reported to DOH.

Additionally, our current reporting system does not allow for:

- Assessing the severity of head injuries.
- Tracking individual students from injury to full return.
- Confirming whether reporting was completed.
- Managing cases where students are not cleared to return to school or activities for longer periods of time.
- Evaluating the management of head injuries.

We know this report does not represent the full scope of student head injuries in Washington.

# Conclusion

Concussions are serious and can significantly affect student learning. 1,161 student concussions were reported to DOH for the 2025-26 school year. After four years of reporting to DOH, some trends are beginning to emerge among Washington school concussion data:

- Male students continue to have the most reported concussions.
- Ninth and tenth graders consistently have the highest number of reported concussions.
- Football continues to be the leading cause of reported concussions.

We are partnering with community and research organizations to provide schools with concussion management tools and resources and continue to work to improve school reporting in future years.

For more information about the reported data from the 2025-26 school year or previous years, please contact studentconcussionreporting@doh.wa.gov. Additional information on the reporting tool can be found online.

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