



EMSA POLICY

		Number: 402.0.0
Policy Type: Zone Operations	Adopted by Board on: January 28, 2017	Supersedes:
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Title: Heading Policy

Policy Statement:

There is to be no instruction and use of headers prior to age 12. Instruction on how to head a ball can be started at age 12 with low force Directional headers, but concurrent with education explaining why heading is not encouraged for technical/developmental reasons as well as possible physiological effects.

Definitions:

- **Header** - is the intentional striking of a soccer ball with a player's head.
- The forehead (at or just below the hairline and above the eyebrows) is used to pass, receive, shoot or "redirect" the ball. Generally, there are two types of headers:
 - a) Directional header where the player wants to control the ball (i.e., a pass, shoot or receive) & which is struck with the forehead (at or just below the hairline, where the player can see the ball) or with the side of the head; and
 - b) Clearing header (where the objective is just to send it as far as possible) which is struck with the forehead at the hairline or with the top of the head & where the defender often leaps to get more power.

Guiding principles:

- ✓ **No Instruction of Headers Prior to age 12** -- Do not instruct on headers until your player is at least 12 years old to allow for greater muscle development and reduce risk of physical injury.
- ✓ Do not instruct on headers unless completely confident you have sufficient training as to how a proper header should be done.
- ✓ Instruction on headers should be concurrent with education explaining why heading is not encouraged for technical / loss of control reasons as well as due to risk of concussion and suspected sub-concussive effects upon the brain.
- ✓ Given the suggestion from medical studies of the potential for sub-concussive injury that can result, particularly during brain development throughout the childhood years, heading should be discouraged for all our 12 year old and under players.

Purpose: There is insufficient research as to just how much force is required before a concussion occurs. Further, while the research only raises the potential of sub-concussive damage resulting from heading, we should, nonetheless, be cautious with our soccer association's emphasis on heading amongst our players at all age levels, and particularly those younger players who are in more vulnerable physiological stages of development.

While the research regarding the effect on players' brains from heading is limited the research has confirmed that certain factors result in a player having a greater potential to get a concussion include:

- age:** younger players are more prone to a concussion and pre-adult brains take longer to recover from a concussion;
- muscle strength:** players with weak neck muscles are more prone to injury;
- awareness:** advance warning of an impending head strike resulting in tensing the neck muscles minimizes the risk; and
- gender:** female players are more prone.

While the research specifically addressing heading has been rather limited to date there have been articles and special reports that speak to the potential repercussions heading may have on soccer players and particularly young players that would justify a cautious approach.