FAQs about Baseline Testing

What is baseline testing?

Baseline testing is a pre-season exam conducted by a trained health care professional. Baseline tests are used to assess an athlete's balance and brain function (including learning and memory skills, ability to pay attention or concentrate, and how quickly he or she thinks and solve problems), as well as for the presence of any concussion symptoms. Results from baseline tests (or pre-injury tests) can be used and compared to a similar exam conducted by a health care professional during the season if an athlete has a suspected concussion.

Baseline testing generally takes place during the pre-season—ideally prior to the first practice. It is important to note that some baseline and concussion assessment tools are only suggested for use among athletes ages 10 years and older.

How is baseline testing information used if an athlete has a suspected concussion?

Results from baseline testing can be used if an athlete has a suspected concussion. Comparing post-injury test results to baseline test results can assist health care professionals in identifying the effects of the injury and making more informed return to school and play decisions.

Education should always be provided to athletes and parents if an athlete has a suspected concussion. This should include information on safely returning to school and play, tips to aid in recovery (such as rest), danger signs and when to seek immediate care, and how to help reduce an athlete's risk for a future concussion.

How often should an athlete undergo baseline testing?

If baseline testing is used, research suggests that most components of baseline testing be repeated annually to establish a valid test result for comparison. Baseline computerized or paper-pencil neuropsychological tests may be repeated every 2 years. However, more frequent neuropsychological testing may be needed if an athlete has sustained a concussion or if the athlete has a medical condition that could affect the results of the test.