



FAQs for RFU Council members to use when in discussion with their clubs, education establishments and referee societies about lowering the tackle height in the community game from 1 July 2023, as agreed by Council on Monday 16th January 2023. Please note, these FAQs will be updated regularly.

Section 1: Scientific evidence supporting the change

Why is the RFU making these changes to the community game?

Players' welfare must always be at the centre of decisions we make about how we play the game of rugby. The RFU is working on a number of initiatives designed to reduce exposure to head impacts in matches and training at all levels of the game.

Evidence from our own research and from around the world clearly shows that lowering the tackle height will reduce both head impact exposure and the risk of concussion. The RFU Council is able to influence how the game is played at the community level in this country and, therefore, has unanimously supported the decision to lower the tackle height to waist level and below. The tackle will remain the primary method of stopping the ball carrier using safe techniques that are taught from an early age.

Why are we making this decision now?

The RFU has been at the forefront of injury surveillance and player welfare for over 20 years. Initially we focused primarily on the recognition and management of concussion (the clinically observable manifestation of head acceleration events). Thanks to our injury surveillance programmes in the professional and community games we were able to accurately estimate risk and then started focussed work on concussion prevention.

In the last 24 months the thinking and science has moved on and we are now able to accurately measure head accelerations with smart mouthguards. As well as preventing concussion, there is now a much greater focus on optimising people's long-term brain health which is believed to be more influenced by lifetime head acceleration exposure rather than the number of concussions experienced. Therefore, it is important to think about how rugby can reduce head accelerations that brains may undergo during collision sports over a playing career, as well as how concussion might be prevented. This has been the focus of the work programme of the Head Impact Prevention and Management Group since its formation in 2021 and we now believe that we have sufficient evidence to make this change.

How was the recommendation developed?

A range of evidence including the 2016 World Rugby and RFU analyses, the evaluations conducted in South Africa, New Zealand and France, along with our own work in the Championship Cup in 2018-19 and the 2022-23 season and RFU U16 waist height tackle trial has been analysed extensively by the Head Impact Prevention and Management Group and it is this that has led them to make their initial recommendation on lowering the tackle height to the line of the navel /waist or below.

What is the evidence that supports the decision to lower the tackle height?

Reducing head acceleration load is now both measurable and achievable and has therefore been what our focus has moved towards. Rugby players are exposed to a significant number of head acceleration events meaning our target to reduce concussions has broadened to include reducing the magnitude and career exposure to head acceleration events.

We have looked to understand what the factors are in the tackle that are associated either with



concussion and/or with head injury assessment and/or with head acceleration events. For all three areas they're broadly the same and they date back to video analysis work that was first done in 2016 and the new work that we've done with instrumented mouthguards since 2022. In essence, we have identified the specifics of tackles that cause these problems, and those that don't, and used these to develop our reduction strategies and these current changes.

A number of studies going back to 2016 have all reached the same conclusion: "Higher contact on the ball carrier and higher head proximity of players in relation to one another is what we see in both the increase in the head injury assessment risk, the concussion risk and the head acceleration event risk." Lowering the height of the tackle and encouraging the tackler to bend more at the waist will minimise the risk of larger head impacts and reduce the risk of concussion while maintaining the tackle as an integral part of the game.

Ball carriers will be encouraged to follow the principle of evasion, which is a mainstay of the game, to avoid late dipping and thereby avoid creating a situation where a bent tackler may be put at increased risk of head-on-head contact with the ball carrier through a late or sudden change in body height of the ball carrier.

Will moving the tackle height downwards mean more injuries from heads hitting knees or feet?

This is one of the areas we will be monitoring closely. However, we know very clearly that the head-to-head contact is far and away the highest risk compared to all other body parts and that the science suggests that this change that lowers the height of contact on the ball carrier and reduces the risk of head-to-head contact will reduce overall injury risk.

Section 2: Law and application

What levels of the game will these changes apply to?

The changes will apply across the community game (clubs, schools, colleges and universities) at both age-grade and adult levels - National One and below in the men's game and Championship and below in the women's game.

Why aren't these changes applied to the elite game?

Changing the law at the elite level is a matter for World Rugby. The RFU supports any law changes that World Rugby propose for the elite game that reduce the incidence of head impacts and is collaborating with World Rugby on smart mouthguard informed updated contact training guidance to reduce head impact exposure in training at the elite level.

How will players who are dual registered/loaned from the professional game be supported?

There are fewer than 250 players falling into this category. The majority of them aged 17 – 21. These players have access to coaching and physical preparation support that will help them develop the skills needed to perform lower height body tackles. It should also be noted that the ability to make lower height tackle is an important skill for a professional player to possess.

How will the impact of the law change be monitored and evaluated?

As well as using existing methods including National Rugby Survey, and the Community Rugby Injury Surveillance Project (CRISP) to assess injury risk, we will be looking at data from smart mouthguards and match analysis to assess any changes in the shape of the game. We will also be seeking direct feedback from the game and will be providing a number of quick and easy ways for this to be given from 1st July onwards.



How will the law change affect the ball carrier?

Law 9 (Foul Play) defines what is reckless or dangerous. The Head Contact Process (HCP), already in use since March 2021 is designed to protect the heads of players. Using both the existing Law and HCP Law application guidelines a sudden and significant drop or movement by the ball carrier that leads to head contact with the tackler that the referee considers intentional, reckless, avoidable would be liable to sanction.

What about head on tackles made near the goal lines/when players are picking up the ball and carrying it forward in an already bent over position.

In this example, the ball carrier may have already set their body height prior to receiving or picking up the ball, giving the tackler the opportunity to adjust their own body height/position so they can make a safe effective tackle.

Will two person tackles still be allowed?

Yes. The two-person tackle will continue to be allowed.

What will happen in those parts of the country that play cross border games?

We are in active dialogue with the Irish, Scottish and Welsh Unions. We are in regular contact with each Union and will notify you as soon as they make their decisions.

Section 3: Support that will be provided to inform, train and educate the game

What support will be made available to the game?

The game in England has a well-established track record of successful implementation of law change. By making this decision now the RFU has taken the opportunity to put in place a programme of technical support for players, coaches and match officials. The technical changes and the technical coaching as well as match official education will be critical.

We welcome the debate this law change will create. Encouraging players, coaches, match officials to discuss safe tackle technique and to get them thinking about how they will approach the interaction between the tackler and the ball carrier will play a key role in implementing these law changes.

The development of resources and content is now underway and will include scheduling of training events ahead of and throughout the 2023-2024 and future seasons. CB Coaching leads and Referee Societies will be invited to support the scheduling and roll out of this training.

The multi-format training offer will include face-to-face, webinar, e-Learning and video, and will be offered throughout next season to referees and coaches. Subject to GDPR permissions we plan to utilise the contact details of 150,000+ age grade players and their parents to provide them with appropriate learning content tailored for each age grade that they can use to further develop their tackle and contact skills.

Will the RFU still provide guidance on management of players who have experienced head impact/concussions

Changes to the community Graduated Return To Play (G RTP) through the Department for Culture Media and Sports (DCMS) led Grassroots concussion guidance will be published in February 2023. Our evaluation of an enhanced elite game G RTP through our World Rugby collaboration on the competition assessment in the Premiership and Allianz Premier 15s, along with the Brain Clinic offering, are all part of this co-ordinated approach but are part of secondary and tertiary prevention.