

Questions and Answers

Alan Pearce PhD, is an Associate Professor in the School of Allied Health at La Trobe University. He was an adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Melbourne School of Health Sciences, The University of Melbourne from 2011-2016. Alan is a neurophysiologist who's primary research focus is on sports-related concussion.

Question	Answers
<p>Is there a difference in the effect of concussion in children compared to adults?</p>	<p>Alan Pearce - Absolutely, yes. What we do know is that kids do take longer to recover after a concussion than adults. And also, trying to understand the symptom reporting as well, because kids are not as effective at reporting their symptoms around concussion. It's important for us to understand how kids are explaining it. And as a result, there is a kid's version of assessment for concussion now as well in order to try to elucidate that. I think the important thing is now to try to understand how long kids are taking to recover because developing brains we have, you know, are very concerned about in terms of concussions for kids with developing brains and also adolescents as well. And that's something that we need to keep understanding a bit more to improve the safety around it.</p>
<p>What was your main take out from the 2019 YJFL Injury Study?</p>	<p>Alan Pearce - We need to be aware, but not alarmed. Concussion is an injury that we need to be concerned about. But don't get over obsessed on it. I think that's one of the things that generally parents do get concerned about. And also, the fact that parents let their kids play. I think that's the important thing is that we're not here to stop anyone from playing, but we just want to make the sport safe. So, yes, there will be concussions. And if there is a concussion, do the right thing. Take it seriously, we get the best care rather than just sort</p>

	of saying, oh, look, it's just a head knock you'll be able to go out next week or in the third quarter.
Do you think the results from the study mean it's safe to play footy in the YJFL?	Alan Pearce - Absolutely. That's not a high rate. By any means. It certainly shows that junior footy in the Yarra juniors is safe, but it does happen and people do need to be aware. And if it does happen, we don't dismiss it. We take it seriously and get the kids off and we assess them.
YJFL is treading new ground, considering not much research has been done like this, is that a fair summary?	Alan Pearce - Absolutely. It's important that we are able to at least collect data, not for the purposes of treating kids as guinea pigs. I think we've got to be really clear here, we've got to make sure that we're doing it for the betterment of everyone involved in the sport. But we do have to collect data in order to inform us how to respond to it, address it and make it better.
Tell me what your recommendations are around the return to play decisions that you have said to players and parents.	Alan Pearce - We need some objective measures, we need to have something that can actually show that the brain has fully recovered, but we need to do it in a non-invasive way, a simple way, a relatively quick way. There's a number of technologies that are coming through now that they can address that. But it's not necessarily a diagnosis to return the player to competition. It's to then use that data to help get the medical clearance.
What would you say to players about being honest to their parents and families with themselves and coaches about getting a head knock?	Alan Pearce - That's one of the things that we do need to get through, is the culture around being honest with concussion. And, you know, different countries have different mindsets. But one of the things that we like to say worldwide is, if in doubt, sit it out. Tim Murray YJFL CEO - The question of culture and understanding that the head injury should be treated in the same way as every other injury is really important to the Yarra Juniors, because what we're trying to do is

	to create a broad awareness around the fact that, we have to be better at dealing with head injuries.
Would it be a good idea to go beyond the minimum protocols set out?	<p>Alan Pearce -</p> <p>I mean, really, the more the better, because we're driven in part by the data which can actually better inform us. At the moment we're reliant on where we're at the moment and the more evidence that comes in can actually improve our precision around specifically the return to play decision. And that's what we want to get is that precision.</p>