

## 'Four weeks' out for concussion: top neurologist



Dr Rowena Mobbs says concussion should be treated with the same level of caution as soft tissue injuries which could lead to multiple weeks on the sidelines Picture: Justin Lloyd.

- **JESSICA HALLORAN**

CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

[@JessiHalloran](#)

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A leading neurologist says footballers should be stood down for a mandatory four weeks rather than missing just one game as the current concussion protocols in AFL, NRL and rugby union stipulate.

That's the view of Dr Rowena Mobbs, who has looked after several high-profile footballers with probable CTE, including Hawthorn star John Platten and Knights player James McManus.

“I certainly think that two weeks is too soon to return to the field and any earlier is a matter of convenience for the team rather than safety (of the player),” Dr Mobbs said.

“There are so many patients who declare symptoms beyond that time window, of confusion, irritability, impaired sleep, poor judgment, poor visual spatial function, which is theoretically going to make another concussion more likely on the field, I think.”

Mobbs said sports leaders had “a duty of care” and believed if concussion was going to be taken seriously they must increase the stand-down threshold and reduce training-related head injuries.

“I think if we’re going to take this seriously and lower the risk of repeated concussion and subconcussion within a short space, which we know leads to worse outcomes, and really advocate for that player’s long-term health and these sports, then I think we have to make some tough decisions,” Mobbs said.

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“The way I see it, I think four weeks is very reasonable. I don’t think it’s overdoing it. We would take similar time off say for hamstring strain or longer for a fracture – this type of rule is not out there medically. This is looking after the brain which is, after all, a necessary part of high performance.”

This season the NRL has taken the power to return players to the field away from club doctors, and appointed independent experts to make the call.

While players were sent back out to play in the 1980s and 1990s – at times after being knocked out – AFL rules currently stipulate that any player recovering from a concussion must spend a minimum of 12 days away from the game.

In 2021 the NRL introduced a rule where players diagnosed with concussion were not allowed to play under an 11-day stand-down period, but could return sooner with the clearance of an independent concussion doctor.

World Rugby announced this year that it would impose a 12-day minimum rest period for players suffering concussion.

Mobbs said she would like sporting codes to invite neurologists and scientists to the table to discuss the protocols further.

Governing bodies such as the World Boxing Association state that “any boxer who has suffered an actual knockout shall be suspended for at least 60 days”.

“If the same boxer suffers a knockout in his next bout or within three months he will be suspended for six months.

Mobb said: “We see in boxing there’s a cap on it.

“At least we ought to have those conversations and I think the NRL, AFL and other football codes need to bring doctors and scientists to the table and former athletes or current athletes to the table to really work this out.

“How much is enough? What risk are we prepared to take on?”

**JESSICA HALLORAN**



### CHIEF SPORTS WRITER

Jessica Halloran is a Walkley award-winning sports writer. She has been covering sport for two decades and has reported from Olympic Games, world swimming and athletics championships, the rugby World Cup as wel... [Read more](#)