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Home > [Journal of Athletic Training](#) > [May 2009](#) > National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Acute Mana...

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Position Statement

National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Acute Management of the Cervical Spine–Injured Athlete

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Abstract

Objective: To provide certified athletic trainers, team physicians, emergency responders, and other health care professionals with recommendations on how to best manage a catastrophic cervical spine injury in the athlete.

Background: The relative incidence of catastrophic cervical spine injury in sports is low compared with other injuries. However, cervical spine injuries necessitate delicate and precise management, often involving the combined efforts of a variety of health care providers. The outcome of a catastrophic cervical spine injury depends on the efficiency of this management process and the timeliness of transfer to a controlled environment for diagnosis and treatment.

Recommendations: Recommendations are based on current evidence pertaining to prevention strategies to reduce the incidence of cervical spine injuries in sport; emergency planning and preparation to increase management efficiency; maintaining or creating neutral alignment in the cervical spine; accessing and maintaining the airway; stabilizing and transferring the athlete with a suspected cervical spine injury; managing the athlete participating in an equipment-laden sport, such as football, hockey, or lacrosse; and considerations in the emergency department.

Keywords: [catastrophic injuries](#), [emergency medicine](#), [neurologic outcomes](#)

Volume 44, Issue 3
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[◀ Previous](#) [Next ▶](#)



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