In a survey of high schools throughout Ohio, seven of 26 schools said they do not have a specific policy on how to handle athletic concussions, and the superintendent at one school and the athletic director of another said they did not know whether they did.

Five of 25 schools said they do not require concussion education training for coaches. Also, five of 24 said the athletic department does not track the number of concussions a high school athlete receives in games and practices, while two superintendents didn’t know.

Only four of the contacted schools sent either records of their concussions or a concussion policy specific to the school.

Six of 19 said their school has not had litigation advisory from the district’s legal counsel regarding concussion-related lawsuits, and respondents from two schools (one a superintendent, one a coach) said they were not sure.

Youngstown City Schools assistant district records officer Mary Carter said the district has no record of a concussion injury in the past nine years.

When asked if Washington High School in Massillon tracks the number of concussions an athlete receives in games and practices, superintendent Richard Goodright responded, “No comment.” Goodright also refused to say whether the school had sought legal advice to assess the potential increased risk of litigation from an athletic concussion-related lawsuit.

In contrast, Chillicothe City Schools has protocols for detecting and managing concussions as well as medical clearance and returning to class, and sent extensive records of more than a dozen concussions that have occurred since the previous school year.

**The state of awareness**

Concussion policy continues to expand in the professional and collegiate ranks. Since 2009, the National Football League has required concussed players to receive clearance from an independent neurologist before returning to game action. The National Collegiate Athletic Association recommends preventing concussed athletes from returning to the game, although that is not a rule.

Even Pop Warner leagues, for kids as young as five years old, has adopted safety guidelines, as reported by The New York Times in a recent story about a Pop Warner game in which five players suffered concussions.

At the high school level, each state has its own governing body for athletic programs, although each state association is a member of the National Federation of State High School Associations. The NFHS added a new rule for the 2010-11 season, stating, “Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion, such as loss of consciousness, headaches, dizziness, confusion or balance problems, shall be immediately removed from the contest and shall not return to play until cleared by an appropriate health-care professional.”
The Ohio High School Athletic Association adopted this regulation. The contest official is responsible for completing a form that indicates what happened. But these guidelines do not apply in practices, so each school can decide on its own whether to establish a policy and track concussions in practices.

**Blurry instructions**

Schools who have concussion guidelines can give varying information. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that “Concussions can occur without loss of consciousness,” and the NFHS’ concussion information form also states that “most sports concussions occur without loss of consciousness.”

Lincoln High School in Gahanna and Zanesville High School both sent the form in response to public records requests asking for concussion policies.

But the NFHS’ new concussion rule lists “loss of consciousness” first in its description of “signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion.”

Napoleon High School also has “loss of consciousness” first in its concussion protocol’s list of signs and symptoms of a concussion.

Harding High School in Warren and Roosevelt High School in Kent - both of which said they track concussions in games and practices but did not send any records - said they follow the “OHSAA Expectations and Regulations on Concussion Management,” which states that student-athletes share the responsibility for recognizing symptoms and that if they lose consciousness, they need to tell their coach.

“If you have symptoms such as loss of consciousness, headache, dizziness, confusion or balance problems, it is your responsibility to report these immediately to your coach and/or health care professional,” the guide says.

**Schools that track**

Chillicothe has a “head injury protocol” for decision-making regarding medical observation, care and clearance. Coaches must also complete a form that lists each applicable symptom.

The school logs injuries through software called SportsWare. It lists the date, name, sport, injury and action taken. The log lists 14 concussions since August 2011; 10 were from football, four from soccer.

Under “action taken,” concussed athletes have been treated by staff, referred to the team MD or sent to the hospital. Additional kept notes show three of the concussed athletes ended up quitting the team.

The protocol also notes that concussion symptoms can reappear during class, and “accomodations can be made” for those students, such as “speech therapy, environmental adaptations, modifications to curriculum, and behavioral strategies.”

Zanesville High School athletic director Doug Smith also said his school uses SportsWare. Superintendent Terry Martin says the school has three certified athletic trainers on staff, with at least one always at every sporting event.

Coventry High School in Akron sent records of four recent head injuries, the earliest being November 2011. Two were from football, the other two from basketball.
The school contracts trainers through the Akron General Medical Center who use a form to track tests performed, prescription, activity level and restrictions.

Several high schools said they use software similar to SportsWare called ImPACT. Among them were Cuyahoga Falls, Lakewood, Strongsville, Lincoln High in Gahanna, Southeast High in Ravenna, Harding High in Warren and Grove City High in Columbus.

ImPACT is a computerized concussion evaluation system, including a test that assesses symptoms, memory and reaction time, according to its website. The software also stores all data from results.

Strongsville sent ImPACT records of 51 concussions since last school year.

Paul Miller, athletic trainer for Lincoln, wrote in an email, “We have had 7 reported incidences of concussions thus far this year in football and tennis and volleyball. I do not cover, thus do not keep the statistics for soccer.”

But Miller said the school does not have electronic records of the concussions. “We use good old-fashioned pen and paper,” he said.