TAPE IT OR DOCTOR?

We know you're playing Saturday regardless. This just tells you whether that's brave or stupid.

A Puck Drop USA Hockey Health sheet — for the knuckleheads we love.

PUCK DROP USA
HOCKEY HEALTH

THE RULES OF THE ROOM

1. **When in doubt, bump it up a level.** If you're standing in the hallway arguing about whether it's a red — it's a red.
2. **Head hits: no same-day return. Ever.** Not for playoffs. Not for the scout in the stands. Done for the day, no debate.
3. **USA Hockey rule: no return without written medical clearance.** A qualified provider signs the Return to Play form — the trainer's word alone doesn't clear you.
4. **Your trainer or doctor wins every argument with this sheet.** This is a guide, not a medical degree.

HEAD / FACE

🟢 **TAPE IT:** Took a bump, feel totally fine, no symptoms — tell the trainer anyway and have a buddy keep an eye on you the rest of the game.

🟡 **SIT:** Headache, dizziness, foggy, nauseous, "just doesn't feel right" — you're done for today. Tell the trainer. Don't drive yourself home. No return without written medical clearance.

🔴 **ER NOW:** Worsening headache, repeated vomiting, confusion, slurred speech, one pupil bigger than the other, weakness or numbness, seizure, can't be woken up, any blackout. Call

SHOULDER

🟢 **TAPE IT:** Sore after a hit, full range of motion, nothing looks wrong — ice it, sling it tonight, reassess tomorrow.

🟡 **SIT:** Can't lift your arm overhead, deep ache inside the joint, or it "slipped out and came back" — you're done, get it looked at this week.

🔴 **DOCTOR NOW:** Visible deformity, shoulder looks flat or squared off, numbness or tingling down the arm, can't move it at all.

KNEE

🟢 **TAPE IT:** Banged it, a little swollen, walks fine — ice, compress, see how it feels in the morning.

🟡 **SIT:** Knee feels unstable or gives way, swells up within the hour, can't fully bend or straighten it — done for the day, doctor this week.

🔴 **ER NOW:** Knee looks deformed, loud pop plus instant swelling plus can't bear weight, foot goes numb or cold.

ANKLE / FOOT

🟢 **TAPE IT:** Rolled it, can take four steps, pain on the outside of the joint and not on the bone — tape it, ice after, lace the skate snug.

🟡 **SIT:** Can't take four steps, swelling fast, pain directly on the ankle bone — done for the day, urgent care for an X-ray.

🔴 **ER NOW:** Deformity, bone through skin, numb or blue toes.

WRIST / HAND

🟢 **TAPE IT:** Jammed finger, swollen but moves fine, nothing crooked — buddy-tape it, ice after.

🟡 **SIT:** Wrist swollen and sore on the thumb side (that's the scaphoid — the famous missed fracture), can't grip your stick — done for the day, get an X-ray.

🔴 **ER NOW:** Deformity, numbness, finger pointing somewhere it shouldn't.

CUTS & LACERATIONS

🟢 **TAPE IT:** Shallow, stops bleeding with a few minutes of pressure, edges come together — clean it, close it, cover it, get back out.

🟡 **SIT (urgent care tonight):** Deeper than a quarter inch, gaping open, over a joint, or on the face — that needs stitches.

🔴 **ER NOW:** Won't stop after 10–15 minutes of firm pressure, spurting blood, numbness below the cut, deep skate cut — keep pressure on it and go.

DENTAL

🟢 **TAPE IT:** Chipped tooth, no pain — dentist this week.

🟡 **SIT:** Cracked or loose tooth, bleeding gums — dentist within 24 hours.

🔴 **DOCTOR NOW:** Knocked-out tooth — pick it up by the crown (never the root), rinse with water only, push it gently back in if you can; if not, keep it in milk or tucked in your cheek. Dentist within 30–60 minutes. Jaw looks wrong or bleeding won't stop — ER.

SOURCES — QUOTED GUIDANCE

CDC HEADS UP: "Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department if you notice any of the following danger signs" after a head hit — including one pupil larger than the other, repeated vomiting, a headache that gets worse and does not go away, slurred speech/weakness/numbness, convulsions, inability to recognize people or places, and loss of consciousness.

CDC HEADS UP action plan: "Keep the athlete out of play the day of the injury and until a health care professional, experienced in evaluating for concussions, says it is symptom-free and it's OK to return to play."

USA Hockey Concussion Management Protocol: a suspected concussion means removal from activity; the Return to Play form "must be signed by their medical provider" before unrestricted training, practice, or competition.

Ottawa Ankle Rules: an ankle X-ray is indicated with malleolar pain plus bone tenderness at the malleoli or inability to bear weight for four steps both immediately after injury and at exam — validated at near-100% sensitivity for clinically significant fractures.

Wound-care consensus (Healthline/WebMD): a cut likely needs stitches if deeper or longer than half an inch, gaping, or still bleeding after 10 minutes of firm direct pressure; spurting blood may signal a severed artery — get emergency care.

Avulsed-tooth guidance (per American Association of Endodontists materials): handle the tooth by the crown only, never the root; keep it moist in milk or saliva (not tap water); see a dentist within 30–60 minutes for the best chance of saving it.

General information only — not medical advice. Your trainer, your doctor, or the ER wins every argument with this sheet.