

The following are points to consider when caring for the helmeted patient with a suspected spinal injury. Suspected spinal injury should be based upon physical assessment and/or mechanism of injury.

A. Helmet Types and Indications for Removal

1. Football Helmets

When the helmet and shoulder pads are on, the spine is kept in a neutral alignment. If either piece of equipment is missing, you must either remove the other piece or place padding for the missing piece.

Indications for football helmet removal:

- a) When the patient is wearing a helmet and no shoulder pads.
- b) The patient has head and/or facial trauma.
- c) The helmet is loose fitting upon the patient's head and the stability is compromised.
- d) Patients requiring advanced airway management when removal of the face mask is insufficient.
- e) Patients in cardiopulmonary arrest (the shoulder pads must also be removed).

*Note: The face mask can be removed from the football helmet using either a screw driver or commercially available cutting device.

2. Other Helmets

In the absence of off-setting padding such as football shoulder pads, all other helmets should be removed. Failure to do so will result in compromising the neutral alignment of the spine. Helmets that should be removed include:

- a) Motorcycle helmets
- b) Bicycle helmets
- c) Skateboard / Ski helmets
- d) Roller blading helmets

B. Steps for Helmet Removal

1. Stabilize the helmet in a neutral in-line position and have a second individual remove the chin strap
2. The individual that removed the chin strap will then support the occiput and mandible while the helmet is gently slipped up and forward.
3. Once the helmet is removed, standard c-spine control will take place and an appropriate sized cervical collar applied

*Note – If the helmet is too snug or you encounter significant resistance during removal attempt, then leave the helmet in place and pad the body. Make sure you can access the airway.

C. Special Notes

Always check the helmet for damage to help assess mechanism of injury. Transport the helmet with the patient whenever possible.