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Headline: The anatomy of a tackle: How changing rugby laws could protect players

Blurb: With plans to lower the tackle height in rugby around the world, why is the governing body for rugby considering it? Put simply, the lower the height, the lower the risk of head injury. Watch for more.

Bullets:

- World Rugby [announced plans](#) to lower the tackle height in the community rugby game, which would make tackles above breastbone illegal.
- The body of the ball carrier can be divided into three zones which have a different risk of head injury to the player making the tackle.
- [Evidence](#) shows that tackles above the shoulder pose the most risk. Here's why a lower tackle height could make the game safer.

Byline: Dylan Bush & Zano Kunene

On 13 March, World Rugby [announced](#) that it backs a lower tackle height in community rugby.

This means players can only tackle an opponent below their breastbone, called a "belly tackle".

World Rugby says unions can choose to be part of a worldwide pilot study to test the new law from May.

The move is meant to reduce the number of head injuries and concussions that players pick up.

What does this mean for South Africa?

The South African Rugby Union says it will [discuss](#) joining the study.

If South Africa enrolls for the research, the legal tackle height will be dropped in amateur and school rugby.

What's happening in other countries?

The Rugby Football Union in England [announced](#) it could lower the tackle height to the waist for community players from June.

Community players are people who don't play professional rugby, this includes school and club rugby.

What's the data behind the change?

World Rugby is basing their stance on new data from a French study that shows dropping the tackle height to the waist results in fewer serious head injuries during the game.

The results have not been published in a peer-reviewed journal, but its findings were [presented](#) at a World Rugby meeting.

Why lower tackles protect both players

The risk of concussion depends on where the tackler hits the player carrying the ball.

Researchers analysed 716 head injuries and found that the risk of head injury for the tackler can be split into three groups.

1. The red zone

Above the shoulder:

The most dangerous tackle for both players because it could result in a head-to-head collision. A head-to-head collision is the most likely to result in concussion.

Knee or elbow

2. The orange zone:

Hip

3. The green zone

The upper leg, lower leg and torso

This story was produced by the [Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism](#). Sign up for the [newsletter](#).