



Sports and Recreation Safety

Key Facts

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that every child should have an opportunity to participate in sports or any recreational activity that promotes regular physical activity. Participation in sports can lead to many health benefits as well as health risks. Although deaths among children playing organized sports are rare, sports injuries among youth are a common and increasing occurrence.

- Approximately 38 million children participate in sports each year in the United States. Nearly three-quarters of U.S. households with school-age children have at least one child who plays organized sports.
- Each year, more than 3.5 million children ages 14 years and under receive medical treatment for sports injuries.
- Although rare, brain injury is the leading cause of sports-related death to children.
- The highest rates of sports-related brain injuries seen in the emergency room visits occurred among children less than 15 years old.
- The most common types of sport-related injuries in children are sprains (mostly ankle), muscle strains, bone or growth plate injuries, repetitive motion injuries, and heat-related illness.

Sport

- A survey found that among athletes ages 5 to 14 years, 15 percent of basketball players, 28 percent of football players, 22 percent of soccer players, 25 percent of baseball players, and 12 percent of softball players have been injured while playing their respective sports.
- Every year, an estimated 700,787 young athletes were treated in hospital emergency rooms for either football or basketball-related injuries.

Where, When and How

- Collision and contact sports are associated with higher rates of injury. However, injuries from individual sports tend to be more severe.
- Each year, approximately 715,000 sports and recreation injuries occur in school settings alone.
- Severe and minor injuries occur during both games and practice, yet a national survey revealed that approximately 33 percent of parents often do not take the same safety precautions during their child's practice as they would for a game.

Who

- Older children are more likely to suffer from bicycle- and sports-related injuries and overexertion than younger children.
- Children account for over 33 percent of all sports-related injuries treated in hospital emergency departments. The rate and severity of sports-related injury increases with a child's age.
- Children who do not wear or use protective equipment are at greater risk of sustaining sports-related injuries. Inappropriate or unavailable equipment are reasons for children's not wearing protective gear.
- The highest rates of injury for boys, in regards to sports, are ice hockey, rugby and soccer. Soccer, basketball and gymnastics seem to incur the highest rates of injury in girls.

Proven Interventions

Sports injuries may be caused by:

- Inadequate physical exams before participating—every child should receive a pre-participation physical exam by the child's doctor before each season.
- Lack of pre-season conditioning
- Lack of safety equipment, or poorly fitted equipment
- Improper training and coaching, or lack of coaching skills and instruction
- Not warming up, cooling down and stretching properly
- Poor nutrition or hydration
- Fatigue, burnout, or playing while injured
- Unsafe playing fields, or surfaces
- Teaming up by age instead of size

Additional Precautions for Coaches and Parents

- Children should have access to and consistently use the appropriate gear necessary for each respective sport.
- Coaches should be trained in first aid and CPR, and should have a plan for responding to emergencies. Coaches should be well versed in the proper use of equipment, and should enforce rules on equipment use.
- Sports programs with access to certified athletic trainers (ATC) are ideal because they are trained to help prevent sport-related injuries as well as provide immediate care for athletic injuries or illness.