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Coaching Our Kids to Fewer Injuries: A Report on Youth Sports Safety





Executive Summary

Sports promote fun, physical fitness, and healthy competition among children. But too often, our kids are sidelined for reasons that are largely avoidable. More than one in three children who play team sports are injured seriously enough to miss practices or games, and some suffer life-long consequences. While cuts and bruises may heal rather quickly, broken bones, knee injuries, and concussions can require weeks and even years for recovery.

No parent intentionally places their young athletes at risk. Many have taken the necessary steps to protect their kids before, during, and after play by taking them for pre-participation physical exams and making emergency contact information easily accessible. Yet misperceptions and uninformed behaviors are all too common, resulting in overuse injuries, dehydration, concussions, or worse. For example, nine in 10 parents underestimate the length of time kids should take off from playing any one sport during the year, and four in 10 underestimate the amount of fluids a typical young athlete needs per hour of play.

A majority of parents worry about their children being injured playing sports and nine in 10 parents say they rely heavily on coaches to keep their kids safe. Yet only two in five parents know how much sports injury prevention training their kid's coaches have received. Further, most parents are only moderately concerned that the coaches' training may not be enough to fully protect their young athletes.

The majority of kids – three in four – say they rely on their coaches the most to keep them safe in practices and games. Yet young athletes often place themselves in harm's way even though most have experienced some type of injury. For example, three out of 10 kids think that good players should keep playing their sport even when they're hurt, unless a coach or adult makes them stop.

Coaches themselves say they want and need more sports safety training, but high cost, lack of time, and few local training opportunities impede them. Nine in 10 report that a child on their team has suffered an injury, making safety training all the more important. Even today, with all the attention on concussions, our study found that half of all coaches surveyed believe there is an acceptable amount of head contact (i.e., getting their bell rung, seeing stars) young athletes can receive without potentially causing a serious brain injury. And parents and kids are also not helping matters much. Nearly half of all coaches report receiving pressure – either from parents or the kids themselves – to play an injured child during a game.

Safe Kids Worldwide is committed to providing leadership and working together with parents, coaches, athletes, schools, safety advocates, athletic trainers, health professionals, legislators, the media, retailers, and manufacturers to help keep our young athletes injury-free. We are all committed to keeping the fun in sports and also dedicated to safety on playing fields and courts. Without a doubt, our collective efforts to change behaviors and dispel misconceptions will help coach our kids to fewer sports-related injuries and lead to healthier and safer kids.



Children who play team sports are injured seriously enough to miss practices or games, and some suffer lifelong consequences.





Introduction

Participation in team sports is great for kids. Involvement builds selfesteem and confidence, promotes teamwork and leadership abilities, increases health and fitness, enhances social skills, and encourages healthy competition. Each year in the United States, an estimated 38 million children play organized sports, and basketball, baseball/softball, football, soccer, and cheerleading are among the most popular.¹ Yet, sports injuries are common, resulting in 3.5 million medical visits annually.² Most of these injuries are preventable through shared responsibility among parents, coaches, athletes, schools, safety advocates, athletic trainers, and medical and health professionals. Safe Kids' mission is simple – to keep kids active, healthy, and injury-free – by changing behaviors and correcting misperceptions about youth sports safety.

Methodology

Safe Kids Worldwide commissioned Salter Mitchell to conduct youth sports safety polls among coaches, parents, and children in the United States to guide its programmatic, advocacy and communications efforts. In February 2012, Harris Interactive's Youth Omnibus online survey collected data on 516 kids ages 8 to 18 who played a variety of sports. In March 2012, data from 750 parents and 752 coaches were collected through an online survey fielded by Survey Sampling International. The socio-demographic characteristics of the three audiences are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Three Target Audiences Surveyed

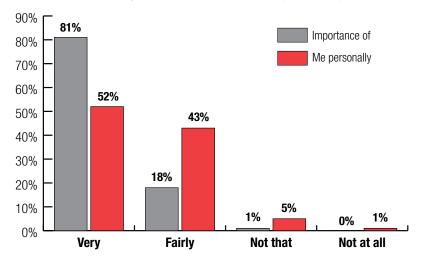
Demographic	Parents (n=750)	Coaches (n=752)	Youth (n=516)
Male	43%	57%	57%
Female	57%	43%	43%
Age 18 to 34	35%	47%	Age 8-12 (54%)
Age 35+	65%	53%	Age 13-18 (46%)
Hispanic	13%	13%	17%
Caucasian/white	77%	77%	60%
African American/black	13%	14%	14%
Asian American	5%	4%	2%

Key Findings – Coaches

Coaches Want and Need More Sports Safety Training

Young athletes and parents alike rely on coaches to possess the knowledge and skills to ensure safety on the field, court, diamond, and in the gym. All coaches surveyed overwhelmingly recognize the importance of being trained and knowledgeable in sports injuries, as shown in Figure 2. More than four-fifths (81%) say it is very important and another 18% believe it is fairly important to have these skills. In terms of their own levels of knowledge and training, slightly over half (52%) describe themselves as very knowledgeable/well-trained, while another 43% feel that they are only fairly so. The coaches reporting the highest levels of knowledge and training were younger coaches ages 18 to 34, paid coaches, and coaches of school and select/travel teams.

Figure 2: Importance of Training and Self-Perceptions of Knowledge How important do you think it is for coaches to be trained and knowledgeable in sports injury?



How knowledgeable and well-trained do you think you are?

Coaches are serious about the issue and are willing to continue adding to their knowledge. Six out of 10 coaches report having gone through some type of sports safety training. When asked an unaided question, CPR instruction was the most common type of training mentioned as having been received (21%), followed by receiving first aid training (13%). The main vehicles through which training was received included clinics, classes, and seminars (15%) and studying the topic in college (13%). Coaches report that they would like more training in concussion prevention (see sidebar) (76%), pre-participation physical exams (73%), and heat illness prevention (73%).

What's a concussion?

According to the Centers for **Disease Control and Prevention, a** concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI), caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that can change the way your brain normally works. Concussions can also occur from a fall or a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth. Even a "ding," "getting your bell rung," or what seems to be a mild bump or blow to the head can be serious. You can't see a concussion but signs and symptoms of concussion can show up right after the injury or may not appear or be noticed until days or weeks after the injury.3

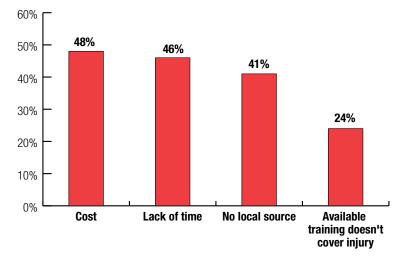
This is the definition of a concussion in the original Lystedt concussion law from Washington State: "A concussion is caused by a blow or motion to the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull. The risk of catastrophic injuries or death are significant when a concussion or head injury is not properly evaluated and managed."⁴

But remember: concussions are not the only injuries sustained in sports.



As shown in Figure 3, barriers to receiving more training were very consistent across all types of coaches, with the top being cost (48%) and lack of time (46%). This was followed by a lack of local sources for coaches to easily access (41%). A free online training module (53%) and a local free clinic (51%) were the top two types of sports safety education desired among coaches.





Most Coaches are More Knowledgeable about Basic Sports Safety than They Realize

When shown a series of statements and asked whether they were true or false, coaches showed high levels of knowledge regarding some aspects of sports injuries and low levels in others. Approximately nine out of 10 coaches recognize that about half of all sports injuries are preventable, that kids need to drink fluid every 20 minutes when playing sports and that most concussions occur without the person losing consciousness. Only about half of coaches (56%) know that more injuries occur during practices than games. Further, more than a quarter (28%) do not realize that kids are at greater risk of sports injuries than adults.

Some Coaches Hold Disconcerting Beliefs

In order to gauge normative beliefs, coaches were shown three statements and asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each. Nearly half (47%) of coaches agree that they have so many responsibilities and so little time that they cannot focus enough on injury prevention. This percent was highest among paid coaches. Further, nearly four out of 10 (39%) coaches agree that more injury prevention training for coaches like them wouldn't make that much of an impact on the rate kids are injured. This percent is highest among younger coaches aged 18-34 and paid coaches. Finally, half (52%) of coaches think there is an acceptable



amount of contact to the head (i.e., getting their bell rung, seeing stars) that can be received without potentially causing a serious brain injury. This percent was highest among coaches under age 35, male coaches, and paid coaches. These disconcerting normative beliefs, particularly among younger, paid coaches appear to be at odds with their higher levels of sports education and training.



Of all coaches surveyed believe there is an acceptable amount of head contact (i.e., getting their bell rung, seeing stars) young athletes can receive without potentially causing a serious brain injury.



Coaches Commonly See Injuries among Young Athletes

Almost nine out of 10 coaches (88%) report that a child on their team has suffered some type of injury. As seen in Figure 4, cuts and scrapes are by far the most common type of injury reported by coaches, followed by bruises and sprains/strains. Coaches who train older kids, ages 15-18, are more likely to report their players have suffered broken bones, overuse injuries, and head injuries.

Figure 4: Type of Young Athlete Injuries Reported by Coaches

Type of injury	All Coaches n=752	Coaches kids age 8-14 n=441	Coaches kids age 15-18 n=72	Coaches both (kids 8-18) n=237
Cut or scrape	70%	70%	69%	71%
Bruises/black and blue marks	54%	54%	50%	55%
Sprain, strain or pulled muscle/ligament	46%	44%	51%	49%
Broken bone	21%	17%	21%	30%
Overuse/stress related	17%	13%	26%	20%
Concussion/head injury	16%	11%	14%	26%
Dehydration/heat- related illness	16%	15%	14%	18%
None of these	12%	13%	14%	10%

Has a child on any of your teams ever suffered the following?

Coaches Experience Pressure from Parents and Young Athletes

Nearly half of all coaches report receiving some type of pressure – either from parents or children – to play an injured child in a game. As seen in Figure 5, the most notable pressure is coming from parents and being directed towards paid coaches. This demand may be hindering coaches' ability to keep player safety as a top priority.

Figure 5: Coaches are Under Pressure to Play Injured Children

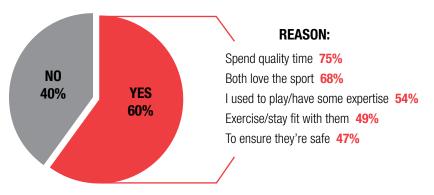
Have you ever felt pressure from adults or children to get a child back into a game if the child has been injured?

	Total Coaches n=752	Volunteer Only n=586	Paid (includes individuals who may also volunteer) n=166
Yes, I have been pressured by a parent	39%	35%	51%
Yes, I have been pressured by a child	20%	20%	18%
No, I have never been pressured	52%	52%	41%

Many Coaches are Parents of Their Young Athletes

Six out of 10 coaches have coached their own children at some point, and while safety wasn't the most commonly cited motivation, it was nonetheless mentioned by approximately half of all coaches. As shown in Figure 6, reasons for coaching their own children are varied, ranging from a desire to spend quality time with their kids to loving the sport to a goal of staying fit.

> Figure 6: Reasons for Coaching Own Children Do you currently or have you ever coached your own kids?



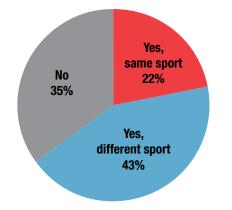


Key Findings – Parents

Parents Report Most Children Participate in Multiple Team Sports

According to parents surveyed, children are juggling multiple sports on multiple teams. More than half (55%) of parents say their child played on two or more teams in the past year. Further, nearly seven out of 10 (65%) say their kids play on more than one team at the same time, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Parents' Report of Child's Team Sport Participation Did your child play on more than one team at the same time?



Many Parents Report their Children Sustain Sports-Related Injuries

Incidence

Four in 10 parents report that their child had suffered an injury while playing a team sport. As seen in Figure 8, cuts, scrapes, and bruises were the most common types of injuries parents report their children suffering. This was followed by sprains/strains/pulled muscles or ligaments. Football had the highest number of injuries and swimming, cheerleading, softball, and track had the lowest number according to parents.

Figure 8: Types of Injuries Sustained by Children Playing Sports

Has your child ever suffered the following types of injuries?

	Total (n=750)
Cut/scrape	57%
Bruises	50%
Sprain/strain/pulled muscle or ligament	35%
Overuse/stress injury	20%
Dehydration	20%
Broken bone	15%
Concussion/head injury	14%
No, child has never suffered any of these	60%



Need for Rest⁵

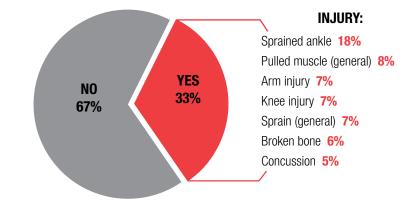
- Encourage athletes to strive to have at least 1 to 2 days off per week from competitive athletics, sport-specific training, and competitive practice (scrimmage) to allow them to recover both physically and psychologically.
- 2. Advise athletes that the weekly training time, number of repetitions, or total distance should not increase by more than 10% each week (e.g., increase total running mileage by 2 miles if currently running a total of 20 miles per week).
- 3. Encourage the athlete to take at least 2 to 3 months away from a specific sport during the year.
- 4. Emphasize that the focus of sports participation should be on fun, skill acquisition, safety, and sportsmanship.
- 5. Encourage the athlete to participate on only 1 team during a season. If the athlete is also a member of a traveling or select team, then that participation time should be incorporated into the aforementioned guidelines.
- 6. If the athlete complains of nonspecific muscle or joint problems, fatigue, or poor academic performance, be alert for possible burnout. Questions pertaining to sport motivation may be appropriate.
- Advocate for the development of a medical advisory board for weekend athletic tournaments to educate athletes about heat or cold illness, overparticipation, associated overuse injuries, and/or burnout.
- 8. Encourage the development of educational opportunities for athletes, parents, and coaches to provide information about appropriate nutrition and fluids, sports safety, and the avoidance of overtraining to achieve optimal performance and good health.
- Convey a special caution to parents with younger athletes who participate in multigame tournaments in short periods of time.

Severity

As shown in Figure 9, severity of injury can lead to reduced participation. One in three parents surveyed indicate that their child had been forced to miss time playing or practicing due to an injury.

Figure 9: Injuries Leading to Missed Playing Time Among Children

Has your child ever had to miss time practicing or playing because of an injury?



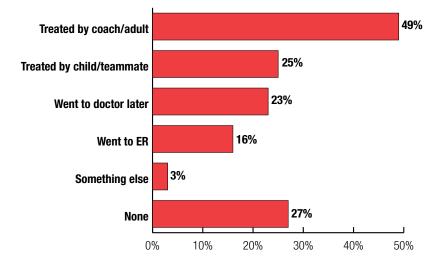
Three in 10 parents also reported that their young athlete had sustained the same injury more than once. These parents report that their young athletes are more likely to play on three or more teams, play on multiple teams at the same time for different sports, and have had to miss time playing or practicing due to injury. Multiple injuries among some young athletes highlights the need for rest to prevent overuse injuries, overtraining, and burnout in young athletes (see sidebar).

Medical Treatment

As indicated in Figure 10, parents whose children had been hurt playing team sports report that about half of injuries (49%) were treated by a coach or adult at the site of the game. This further underscores how imperative it is that coaches receive sports injury prevention training. One out of three (32%) of the injuries were severe enough to require medical treatment, either treated immediately in the emergency department or in a doctor's office at a later time. Note that this question allowed for multiple responses, so the individual percents for these two treatments should not be added together.

Figure 10: Types of Treatment for Injuries

For any injuries your child has suffered, which types of treatments were used?

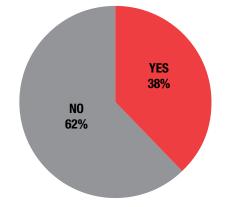


Many Parents Neither Know nor Express Concern About Coaches' Safety Training

Only two in five parents (38%) know how much sports injury prevention training their kid's coaches had ever received, as seen in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Parent's Knowledge of Coaches' Sports Injury Training

Do you know how much sports injury prevention training all your kid's coaches have had?



Despite a majority of parents being unsure of the amount of safety training their children's coaches have received, most parents were still only moderately concerned that it may not be enough to adequately protect their kids, as depicted in Figure 12.

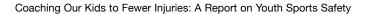
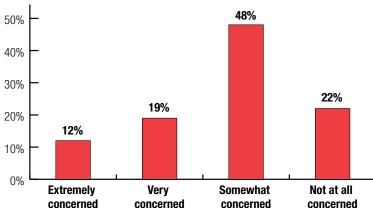




Figure 12: Parents' Level of Concern about Coaches' Safety Training How concerned are you that your children's coaches don't receive



enough training in sports safety?

Parents Express Concern Over Children's Sports Injury Risk

Three in four parents in the survey express worry about their children being injured playing sports. More than one-third (34%) worry often or always about the likelihood and more than four in 10 (43%) worry sometimes, as indicated in Figure 13. The leading reason given for worrying more is that "sports are physical and dangerous." Among parents who did not worry all that much, the prevailing attitudes were that "injuries are just part of the game," "children can protect themselves," and "accidents happen."

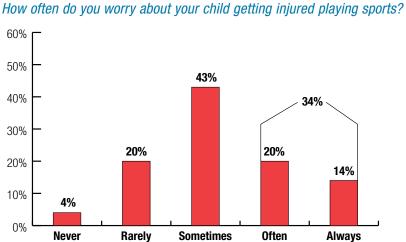
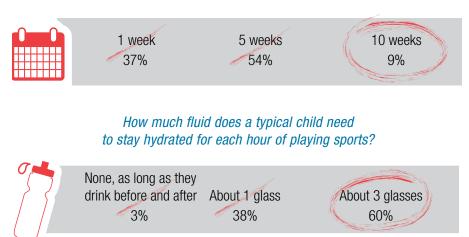


Figure 13: Parents' Injury Fears

Parents Are Overconfident about their Own Sports Safety Knowledge

Parents generally estimate highly their knowledge of sports injury prevention, with eight out of 10 saying they are either very or fairly knowledgeable. The parent sub-groups who assess their knowledge the highest are younger parents ages 18-34 and parents of kids ages 8-9. Yet parents are overconfident and may actually know less than they think they do, as depicted in Figure 14. For example, nine out of 10 parents underestimate the length of time kids should take off from playing any one sport during the year. In addition, about four out of 10 parents underestimate the amount of fluids a typical child needs per hour while playing sports. Not surprisingly, parents of younger kids age 8-14 are more likely to underestimate this compared to parents of older kids ages 15-18.

Figure 14: Parents' Misperceptions of Sports Safety How long should kids take a break between playing any one sport during the year?



Base: All parents, n = 750

Further, when shown a list of potential signs of a concussion, some – dizziness and loss of consciousness – were more recognizable among parents, while others – pressure in the head and fatigue – were thought to be less indicative of serious injury. All items in Figure 15 are potential signs and symptoms of concussion.



Parents underestimate the amount of fluids a typical young athlete needs per hour of play.



Figure 15: Parents' Recognition of Potential Signs and Symptoms of Concussion

	Total (n=750)	
Dizziness or "seeing stars"	87%	
Loss of consciousness	81%	
Vomiting	72%	
Pressure in the head	69%	
Fatigue	63%	

Which of the following are potential signs of a concussion?

Most Parents Have Taken Simple Steps to Protect their Children

A majority of parents report having taken necessary steps to protect their kids before, during and after play. They say that their kids' coaches have their emergency contact information and any special medical information about their kid available to them during practices and games (84%). In addition, they report their kids are required to have a pre-participation physical examination every year before they play sports (75%), a finding much higher among older kids ages 15-18 as compared to younger kids aged 8-14. Finally, the majority of parents rely heavily on coaches to keep their kids safe (92%). This finding highlights the important role coaches play in the eyes of parents and underscores the need for coaches to be knowledgeable, trained, and skilled in preventing and responding to children's sports-related injuries.

Key Findings – Young Athletes

Fewer than Half of Kids Surveyed Participate in Team Sports

Of the 1,126 kids initially queried online, a total of 516 (or 45% of the children surveyed) reported playing one of the sports needed to qualify for the survey: basketball, soccer, baseball, football, track and field, martial arts, softball, cheerleading, gymnastics, wrestling, field hockey, lacrosse, and ice hockey. Among the children who played a relevant sport, basketball (37%) was the most frequently played sport followed by soccer (33%), baseball (25%), and football (19%). In terms of gender, the top three sports for 8-14 year old males were baseball, basketball, and soccer. Among 8-14 year old females, the top three sports were soccer, basketball, and cheerleading.



Young Athletes are Familiar with Others' Sports Injuries

Seven out of 10 kids report having heard about some type of sports injury. This number was consistent across age and gender groups. Not surprisingly, football was the most frequently mentioned sport that caused injuries (39%), followed by basketball (16%) and soccer (15%). As noted in Figure 16, the most frequently mentioned type of injury was broken bones (23%), followed by specific parts of the body that are injured (17%) such as dislocated shoulders and a hurt back. Head injuries were mentioned by 13% of kids (9% of whom specifically said concussions). The most frequently mentioned cause of sports injuries was contact (tackled/checked/hit) at 13%. Hence, injuries are a salient topic among kids, but awareness could be heightened for other types of injuries such as overuse, heat illness, and concussion.



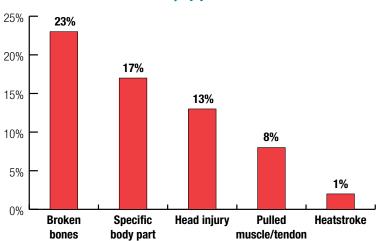


Figure 16: Kids' Familiarity with Different Types of Injury What was the injury you heard about?

Kids Often Receive Specific Injury Prevention Advice from Coaches

In terms of specific preventative measures that kids had been told to take by their coaches, the top three across the most commonly played sports were to warm up and stretch, make sure they drink enough water, and to tell an adult if they're hurt. For most sports played, more than 70% of kids have been advised to take these actions. Less often, kids were counseled to take rest breaks during games and practices, always wear the right equipment appropriately, and to take time off from sports during the year. I've stopped playing a sport because it stopped being fun.

I've stopped playing a sport because I got hurt or was afraid of getting hurt.

I've stopped playing a sport because my parents were worried about me getting hurt and made me stop.

None of these are true.

Many Kids Report Sustaining Sports Injuries and Some Stop Playing

Four out of 10 (42%) children report having been injured badly enough at some point while playing sports that a coach or adult made them take a break until they felt better. The percent of older kids 15-18 years (52%) reporting this was significantly higher than younger kids 8-14 years (44%). Overall, 10% of children say that they stopped playing a sport because they were hurt or feared being hurt, while 6% were forced to stop playing a sport by parents who feared their child would be injured. These rates were significantly higher among older kids ages 15-18, as shown in Figure 17. Strikingly, a quarter (26%) of all children stopped playing a sport because it was no longer fun for them, but specific reasons for this were not captured in the survey.

Figure 17: Reasons Kids Report for Stopping Team Sports Participation

\backslash	Total (n=516)	Age 8-14 (n=371)	Age 15-18 (n=145)
	26%	23%	34%
	10%	7%	19%
	6%	4%	11%
-	64%	69%	50%

Which of the following are true for you?

Kids Rely on their Coaches to Keep Them Safe

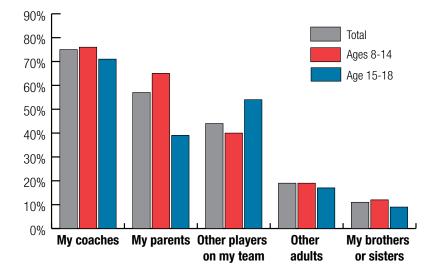
As shown in Figure 18, the majority of kids surveyed say they depend heavily on their coaches to keep them safe and generally try to comply with their coaches' guidance. Overall, 75% of study participants list their coaches as the person they rely on most to keep them from getting injured during sports. Fifty-seven percent of children say that they rely on their parents to keep them safe, while 44% rely on other players on their team. After coaches, there is a split depending on the age of the children; kids 8-14 rely more on their parents, while player ages 15-18 count on other team members to help keep them safe. Three in 10 (31%) young athletes agree that "good players should keep playing their sport even if they are hurt unless a coach or adult makes them stop." Boys ages 15-18 (44%) were most likely to agree with this statement.



Young athletes agree that "good players should keep playing their sport even if they are hurt unless a coach or adult makes them stop," with 44% of boys ages 15-18 agreeing with this statement.



Figure 18: Kids Trusted Sources of Sports Safety Information When it comes to staying safe while playing sports, who do you depend on the MOST to help keep you from getting hurt?



By the Numbers: Youth Sports Injuries⁶

- More than **38 MILLION** children and adolescents participate in sports each year in the United States.
- Nearly **THREE-OUARTERS** of United States 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.
- Approximately **TWO-THIRDS** of all sports-related injuries leading to emergency department visits are for children. The rate and severity of sports-related injury increases with a child's age.
- From 2001 through 2009, it is estimated that there were
 1,770,000 emergency department visits, 6% of these for traumatic brain injuries, among children ages 14 and under for injuries related to sports or recreation.
- Though rare, traumatic brain injury is the leading cause of sportsrelated death.
- Approximately **ONE OUT OF FIVE** traumatic brain injuries among children are associated with participation in sports and recreational activities.
- More than **90 PERCENT** of sports-related concussions occur without the loss of consciousness.
- Most organized sports-related injuries 62 PERCENT
 occur during practice rather than games.

Call to Action

Children who participate in team sports have the opportunity to live healthier lives and learn valuable lessons about cooperation, fair play, and self-discipline. Yet, at least one in three children is injured playing team sports, some with serious, life-long consequences (see opposite page). Given that most of these injuries are preventable, our nation must do more to protect our children. Safe Kids Worldwide is committed to providing leadership and working together with parents, coaches, athletes, schools, safety advocates, athletic trainers, health professionals, legislators, the media, retailers, and manufacturers to help keep our athletes healthy and injury-free. Specific initiatives that Safe Kids will undertake are to:

- Mobilize our 600 Safe Kids coalitions and chapters to continue to educate coaches, parents, and children through free sports safety clinics and in other community venues about sports safety practices.
- Conduct outreach to traditional and social media outlets to spread these vital messages about receiving pre-participation physical exams and preventing concussion, dehydration, and overuse injuries.
- Urge coaches and athletic trainers to have an emergency action plan in place in case a child is injured or there is a medical emergency (e.g., sudden cardiac arrest).
- Collaborate with the medical community to provide educational and training opportunities for parents and coaches on sports injury prevention.
- Promote the development of enhanced sports injury surveillance data systems as well as research on the effectiveness of preventive interventions.
- Encourage industry efforts to innovate further in making sports gear (e.g., helmets, pads, shin guards, mouth guards) safer and support manufacturers in their efforts to promote appropriate fit.
- Advocate for the passage, strengthening, and enforcement of youth concussion laws in all 50 states and lobby school boards to adopt broad-based safety programs for all sports and both genders.

Together with our partners, Safe Kids Worldwide is dedicated to eliminating preventable youth sports injuries. Without a doubt, our collective efforts will help us coach our kids to fewer sports-related injuries and lead to healthier, safer, and active kids.



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