

Playing It Safe

April is National Youth Sports Safety Month

Ahhh, springtime! Along with the sounds of babbling brooks, leaves rustling in the breeze and birds chirping, you may hear the sounds of bats cracking as they connect with baseballs, cleats thumping against soccer balls and the whoosh of rackets smashing tennis balls.

If you're a parent, one sound you don't want to hear is "Ouch!" – as when a child gets hurt while playing sports.

Sports activities are the second most frequent cause of injury for adolescents. It's estimated that each year, more than five million children require treatment in hospital emergency rooms due to sports injuries.¹

Common sports injuries and related problems among children include:

- Musculoskeletal injuries. These can include fractures, contusions, sprains, strains and lacerations.
- Eye injuries, such as cuts, bruises, retinal detachments and internal bleeding. Eye injuries are one of the leading causes of visual impairment in children.²
- Dehydration and other heat-related problems. Children get overheated more quickly than adults and cannot cool down as easily. Participating in outdoor sports makes children vulnerable to sunburns.
- Eating disorders. Sports safety should include proper nutrition.
- Repetitive-motion injuries, such as stress fractures and tendonitis.



The good news is that most sports-related injuries can be prevented.

Follow these steps from experts in youth sports safety to help reduce the chance of your child getting injured while participating in sports:

- Get a physical exam. Before starting a sport, have your child undergo a physical exam to rule out any medical conditions or potential risk factors.
- Use safety equipment. Make sure your child wears sport-specific protective gear, including eye protection, that fits properly.
- Warm up and cool down. It's important to warm up and stretch the body before practices and games – and it's just as important to stretch and cool down afterward.
- Get educated. Be sure the coaches know the safety rules of the sport and are trained in first aid and CPR.
- Know when there's an injury. Never let your child play through an injury – it could make things worse.
- Stay hydrated, especially during hot or humid weather. Children need frequent rest breaks when practicing or playing in that kind of weather.
- Have an emergency plan. Coaches should have a plan of action in case of emergencies.

Following those important steps can help ensure that the only sounds you hear while your children play sports are the sounds of you cheering them on!

1. National Youth Sports Safety Foundation. www.nyssf.org/information.html. Accessed January 31, 2008. 2. American Academy of Ophthalmology. American Academy of Ophthalmology Urges Athletes to Wear Protective Eyewear. www.aao.org/newsroom/release/20070315. cfm. Posted March 15, 2007. Accessed February 5, 2008.