

Injury Facts

Sports Injury

The Facts

Participation of children, especially girls, in organized and informal sports continues to grow. Nearly three-quarters of U.S. households with school-age children have at least one child who plays organized sports. Sports participation is beneficial to children in many ways. It can improve physical fitness, coordination, self-discipline and teamwork, as well as promote a sense of personal satisfaction and accomplishment.

However, growth in sports participation has contributed to an increase in sports- and recreation-related injuries. The risk of physical injury is inherent in sports participation. Furthermore, children are more susceptible to these injuries because they are still growing and gaining motor and cognitive skills. It is estimated, however, that half of all organized sports-related injuries among children can be prevented.

SPORTS-RELATED DEATHS AND INJURIES

- More than 3.5 million children ages 14 and under receive medical treatment for sports injuries each year. The majority of these injuries are from falls, collisions, overexertion or being struck by an object, and they usually occur during unorganized or informal sports activities.
- Death among children during participation in sports activities is rare. Brain injury is the leading cause of sports-related death.
- Injuries associated with participation in sports and recreational activities account for 21 percent of all traumatic brain injuries among children in the United States.
- Nearly half of all sports- and recreation-related head injuries to children are caused by bicycle, skating and skateboard incidents.
- Overuse injury, which occurs over time from repeated motion, is responsible for nearly half of all sports injuries to middle- and high-school students. Immature bones, insufficient rest after an injury, and poor training or conditioning contribute to overuse injuries among children.

WHEN AND WHERE SPORTS INJURIES OCCUR

- Older children are more likely to suffer from bicycle- and sports-related injuries and overexertion than younger children.
- Collision and contact sports are associated with higher rates of injury. However, injuries from individual sports tend to be more severe.
- It is estimated that half of all significant sports-related injuries are treated in sports medicine clinics instead of hospital emergency rooms.
- Sports injuries account for approximately 55 percent of nonfatal injuries at school.
- Thirty percent of parents report that their child has been injured while playing a team sport; half of these say the child has been injured more than once. Nearly a quarter of these parents report the injury was serious.
- Most organized sports-related injuries (62 percent) occur during practices rather than games. Despite this fact, a third of parents often do not take the same safety precautions during their child's practices as they would for a game.

Injuries by Sport

- A recent survey found that among athletes ages 5 to 14, 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.
- In 2002, more than 207,400 children ages 5 to 14 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for basketball-related injuries.
- In 2002, nearly 187,800 children ages 5 to 14 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for football-related injuries.
- In 2002, nearly 76,200 children ages 5 to 14 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for soccer-related injuries.
- Baseball has the highest fatality rate among all sports for children ages 5 to 14. Each year, three to four children die from injuries sustained while playing baseball. In 2002, nearly 116,900 children ages 5 to 14 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for baseball- or softball-related injuries.
- In 2002, nearly 21,200 children ages 5 to 14 were treated in hospital emergency rooms for gymnastics-related injuries.

WHO IS AT RISK

- Children are at greater risk than adults for sports injuries because they are unable to assess the risks involved and have less coordination, slower reaction times and less accuracy.
- Black children are one and a half times more likely than white children to suffer sports-related injuries.
Children ages 5 to 14 account for nearly 40 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.
- Among children ages 5 to 9, sports-related injuries occur more frequently among girls than boys. However, during puberty (ages 10 to 14) boys are injured more frequently and severely than girls. Boys ages 10 to 14 are two times more likely to be treated in a hospital emergency room for a sports-related injury than girls of the same age. In addition, boys are more likely than girls to suffer from multiple injuries.
- Children who are new to a sport are at greater risk of a sports-related injury.
- Children who do not wear or use protective equipment are at greater risk of sustaining sports-related injuries. Lack of awareness about potential injury, inappropriate or unavailable equipment, and lack of money to purchase equipment are some of the reasons children do not use protective gear.
- Sports injury risk is associated more with a child's stage of development than age or body size. A less developed child competing against a more mature child of the same age and weight is at a disadvantage and may be at greater risk for injury.

SPORTS INJURY PREVENTION EFFECTIVENESS

- Protective equipment, safe playing conditions (e.g., field surfacing, maintenance) and development and enforcement of safety rules help reduce the number and severity of sports injuries.

PREVENTION TIPS

- Before enrolling in a sport, all children should receive a general health exam.

- Children should always wear sport-specific, properly fitting safety gear when participating in sports activities.
- Make sure proper physical and psychological conditioning, use of appropriate safety equipment, a safe playing environment, adequate adult supervision and enforced safety rules are included in any sports program. Provide children with proper training and skills-building when they are learning a new sport.
- Group children according to skill level, weight and physical maturity.
- Ensure that children drink an adequate amount of liquids while engaging in athletic activities. Provide frequent rest periods during hot or humid weather.

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Research more [facts about unintentional childhood injury](#)

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