

Prevention of Sports-Related Injuries

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The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry is concerned about the prevalence of sports-related injuries in our nation's youth. The increased competitiveness in youth sports has resulted in an alarming number of dental and facial injuries which, combined, represent a high percentage of the total injury experienced in youth sports.

The administrators of youth, high school and college football, lacrosse, and ice hockey have demonstrated that dental and facial injuries can be significantly reduced by introducing mandatory protective equipment. Popular sports such as baseball, basketball, soccer, field hockey, softball, wrestling, volleyball, and gymnastics lag far behind in injury protection for girls as well as boys. Youths participating in leisure activities such as skateboarding, roller-blading and bicycling should also use appropriate protective equipment.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, therefore, recommends the continuation of those prevention practices that have been instituted in youth, high school and college football, lacrosse, and ice hockey. In addition the following are deemed critical for reducing the prevalence of oral and facial injuries as well as other bodily injuries in youth sports.

1. A properly fitted sports mouthguard be recommended for all children and youth participating in organized and unorganized contact and collision sports.
2. The Academy supports mandates for the use of athletic mouthguards in any sporting activity containing the risk of orofacial injury.
3. A dentist with expertise in dental and facial injuries be consulted prior to the start of a season to recommend procedures for dealing with sports-related injuries, such as avulsed teeth.
4. A certified** face protector be required* for boys and girls age 12 and under participating in organized baseball and softball activities and be recommended for youths age 13 through high school participating in organized baseball and softball activities.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recognizes that there are three types of mouthguards that are available. These are stock or preformed (ready-to-wear), mouth formed, and custom fitted. Without question the custom-fitted appliance which is made by a dentist is also the preference of athletes when they have been surveyed. When this is not available the mouth formed mouthguard is preferable to the stock or preformed mouthguard. Any mouthguard that is used will only be effective if it is properly fitted and properly worn.

In the area of public education, Academy members are urged to play an active role in encouraging and assisting state and local youth sports organizations to become more active in the use of protective equipment, not only to prevent sports injuries but also to reduce health care costs.

Members of the Academy are encouraged to keep abreast of developments in sports dentistry and medicine and to play an active role in those areas which require expertise and in which dentistry has already demonstrated effective action.

The Academy also encourages research toward the continuing development of a comfortable, effective, and cost effective sports mouthguard to facilitate more widespread use of this proven protective device.

* Made mandatory according to the playing rules of the sport.

** ASTM (American Society of Testing Materials).

References

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