

# SPORTS & RECREATION

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## TARGET → ON SAFETY

### Children's Sports Safety: An Overview

Every day, from soccer fields to ice rinks, millions of youths participate in sporting activities. Participating in sports builds the body and mind, but it can also result in injury if the proper safety precautions are ignored.

Each year, over 3 million children ages 14 and under suffer from sports-related injuries. It is estimated that as many as 20 percent of children participating in sports are injured each year. Young athletes are at an increased risk for injury because their bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments are still growing.

#### Safety Tips

The risk of injury should not keep a child from participating in sports. Instead coaches, officials and staff need to follow safety guidelines and provide the proper protective equipment to keep young athletes safe during play. Parents, coaches and children are encouraged to follow these safety precautions:

- Know and follow the rules of the sport.

- Be in good physical condition before beginning any sport.
- Wear proper apparel and protective gear.
- Know how to use athletic equipment.
- Be sure to warm up before playing.
- Drink plenty of liquids before playing to prevent dehydration.
- Do not play when tired or in pain.

#### If Injury Occurs

Prompt treatment can often prevent a minor injury from turning into something much worse. The first step is to use RICE therapy—an acronym for the steps you should take immediately following an injury:

- **Rest:** After being injured, an athlete should immediately rest.
  - **Ice:** Ice the injury to prevent swelling.
  - **Compress:** Wrap a bandage or towel around the injury.
  - **Elevate:** Elevating the injury can help drain excess fluid and reduce swelling.
- Sometimes, an injury will be more severe. If a child displays any of the following signs, he or she may need to visit the doctor:
- Inability or decreased ability to play
  - Visible deformity
  - Severe pain that prevents the use of an arm or leg
  - Symptoms which persist or affect athletic performance



## Eye Injuries

According to the National Eye Institute, eye injuries are the leading cause of blindness in children, and most of those eye injuries are sports-related. Eye injuries can be classified into three basic categories:

- **Blunt trauma** occurs when something hits the eye, like a hand, elbow or ball, and commonly results in bruising around the eye. This is the most common sports-related eye injury.
- **Penetrating injuries** occur when something cuts into the eye, most often a finger. These injuries are fairly uncommon.
- **Radiation injuries** are caused by exposure to ultraviolet light from the sun. They most often occur in snow- or water-related sports like skiing, snowboarding or water-skiing.

Many blunt trauma injuries can be treated with the application of an ice pack. Still, given how valuable and fragile the eyes are, it's a good idea to have all eye injuries examined by a medical professional.

## Concussions

Head injuries can be especially scary for children. Sometimes,

head injuries can result in concussions—an injury to the brain that can have long-term effects on the injured child.

Some children might be reluctant to report their symptoms for fear of being sidelined. That's why coaches, officials and staff need to watch for the following symptoms:

- Dazed or stunned demeanor
- Clumsy movement
- Forgetting the score, position, assignment or other information
- Answering questions slowly
- Loss of consciousness, even if brief

If you observe these symptoms in an athlete, it's essential to remove the athlete from play immediately, have him or her seek medical attention and do not allow him or her to return to play until the athlete has been cleared by a medical professional.

## Safety Tips

Most sports-related injuries are preventable. The following are steps coaches and parents can take to help reduce the chances of an injury occurring:

- Have an adult present when children engage in sports.
- Make sure children are using appropriate and properly fitted protective equipment.
- Explain that helmets only offer some protection—no helmet is concussion-proof.
- Teach children to stretch beforehand to reduce the risk of strains or other injuries.
- Remind children to cool down afterwards.