

Sport & recreation safety



The Royal Children's Hospital Safety Centre, Melbourne 2008

Sport is a very important pastime for many children providing opportunities for exercise, fun and socialisation. Generally the benefits children derive from participating in sport will far outweigh the risks. Injuries however do occasionally occur, particularly when children engage in competitive or high-risk sports. Common types of injuries include fractures, cuts and lacerations, dislocations and sprains and strains. Applying first aid immediately after an injury can make a difference to the outcome. Rest following an injury is also important, as is a gradual return to the sport.

Rates of injury

Sports-related injuries account for at least 40% of injury hospital admissions and 20% of injury hospital emergency department presentations for children aged 10–14 years.

The majority of sports and recreational injuries involve boys (72% of hospital admissions).

Main causes of sports and recreational injuries

Some of the sports and recreational activities that account for a high frequency of injury hospitalisations include:

- Australian Rules Football
- Skateboarding, in-line skating (rollerblading)
- Bicycling
- Motorcycling
- Soccer
- Basketball
- Netball
- Cricket
- Gymnastics

Suggested ways to reduce the risk of sports injury

There are numerous sporting activities in which children can be encouraged to participate until they have developed muscle strength and coordination. These activities include athletics, swimming and gymnastics.

Competitive sports

The risk of injury is higher when a child is unfit, has been unwell or feels pressure to play a particular sport not of their choosing.

Encourage children to participate in sports they find enjoyable and most importantly have fun doing.

Warm-up and cool-down exercises before and after playing sport will help to stretch tight muscles that are more prone to injury.

Many sports have modified rules for children. This includes smaller teams, a smaller playing area and the use of a softer and smaller ball.

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Competitive sports – cont.

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Many sports have modified rules for children. This includes smaller teams, a smaller playing area and the use of a softer and smaller ball.

When choosing teams children should be evenly matched on height and weight, size and ability, rather than age.

Inspect playing fields for potential hazards prior to commencement of play.

Encourage the use of personal protective gear.

All coaches should have Level 1 coaching training accreditation from National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS).

Extraneous objects should be removed from all playing areas.

Encourage the use of hats and sunscreen for all outdoor activities.

Football

Children are best playing modified rules.

Proper gear will make a difference, for instance boots for ankle protection and a mouthguard that is preferably fitted by a dentist.

Mouthguards should be worn at training and at matches to prevent dental injuries.

The goal and point posts should be padded.

Cricket

Children are best playing modified rules known as “Kanga Cricket”.

Helmets with face shields should be compulsory for batsmen and fielders close to the wicket

As injuries are often to the head and hands, children should use:

- gloves as well as groin, shin and forearm protectors when batting
- softer bats and low impact balls to reduce injury
- an Australian Standards approved helmet with a face shield when batting, wicket keeping or fielding (this should not obstruct vision).

Basketball & netball

Children are best playing modified rules, e.g. Netta Netball.

Hand and finger injuries are less likely with a smaller, softer ball.

Children need to be taught correct landing and catching techniques.

Soccer

Children are best playing modified rules known as “Rooball”.

Gloves, groin and shin pads are advisable.

Skateboarding & in-line skating (rollerblading)

Children should use wrist guards, elbow and kneepads and wear a bicycle helmet.

Ensure protective gear fits well.

Children should warm up before skating and learn how to fall correctly.

Novice skaters should take lessons to learn the basics of controlled skating and stopping and ‘safe fall’ techniques in supervised settings e.g. lessons provided by hire shops.

Ensure boarders receive formal instruction on how to ride skateboards safely i.e. learn balance and control in a supervised setting e.g. City Skate Park where tuition for school groups is provided.

Modify the wheels on beginner skateboards to increase friction and slow them down i.e. soft or used wheels. New fast wheels can be refitted once adequate skills have been acquired.

Encourage children to skate in safe areas, i.e. not on roads or footpaths.

Use impact-absorbing surfaces around and under ramps (where possible).

Maintain skating surfaces in skateboard areas and parks ensuring they are free from irregularities and debris.

For further information
about the Safety Centre
Telephone 9345 5085

www.rch.org.au/safetycentre

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