

► IDEA Playbook

When It Comes To Kids, *Safety Is No Accident* 8 Ways To Keep Athletes Safe

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Youth sports participation is a fantastic opportunity for our children. Youth athletes learn about teamwork, competition and the importance of physical fitness. However, with competition comes natural risks. The following tips are important for parents, coaches and planners of amateur sporting events to reduce risk and keep youth athletes safe.

1 Get a pre-participation exam: All athletes should have a pre-participation exam to determine their readiness to play and uncover any condition that may limit participation.

2 Have an emergency action plan: Every venue should have a written emergency action plan, reviewed by an athletic trainer or local emergency medical service. Individual assignments and emergency equipment and supplies should be included in the emergency action plan.

3 Beat the heat: Youth coaches should gradually acclimatize athletes to warm weather activities over a 14-day period. The goal is to increase exercise heat tolerance and enhance the ability to exercise safely and effectively in warm and hot conditions.

5 Obtain athletes' medical history: Parents should complete an emergency medical authorization form, providing parent contact information and permission for emergency medical care for the student athlete. This should be readily available at all practices and events.

4 Use your head: Be certain that coaches, athletes, parents and medical personnel are well educated on concussion prevention, management and care, and that the athlete is encouraged to speak up if hit in the head and suffering from any related symptoms, including dizziness, loss of memory, light headedness, fatigue, or imbalance.

6 Ensure equipment is in working order: Make sure all equipment ranging from field goals, basketball flooring, gymnastics apparatus and field turf are in safe and working order. This also includes emergency medical equipment such as spine boards, splinting devices and AEDs (which should be checked once per month; batteries and pads need consistent monitoring and replacing). Check fields and courts for hazards such as standing water, rocks, branches, divots or uneven surfaces. All it takes is a slip on a wet surface or twist of an ankle on an ungroomed field to lead to lower extremity injuries, among others.

7 Provide proper coaches training: Ideally, an athletic trainer would be present for every youth sports event. However, in many cases this isn't possible. Coaches should have cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), AED and first aid training. Coaches should strictly enforce the sports rules and have a plan for dealing with emergencies.

8 Encourage your coaches to complete a sports safety course: NATA recently released an online Sports Safety for Youth Coaches course that provides a comprehensive review of the latest information on health and safety issues facing young athletes. Those who complete it receive a certificate of completion and will be listed for two years on NATA's Youth Coaches Registry. www.nata.org/Sports-safety-for-youth-coaches-course

for more info:

These tips offer a starting point in improving the safety of your youth athletes during competition. Coaches, parents, event organizers, athletic trainers, emergency personnel and all others involved in the care of the youth athlete must establish clear and open communication to ensure a safe sports environment. For more information on sports safety, please visit www.nata.org.

Larry Cooper is chair of the National Athletic Trainers Association Secondary School Athletic Trainers Committee.

