

## Sports are the leading cause of youth eye injuries

Active children have the advantage of being in good physical shape and keeping their weight in check. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say one in five children are considered overweight or obese, but being engaged in a sport or other activity promotes exercise, which can be a good thing for both physical and mental health.

Although playing sports is beneficial for various reasons, there are some inherent risks to participating in them as well. Physical injuries, such as concussions and broken bones, can result from participating in sports. But perhaps surprisingly, eye injuries are quite common among young athletes. Such injuries often do not get the attention with regard to prevention that statistics suggest they warrant.

According to the National Eye Institute, eye injuries are the leading cause of blindness

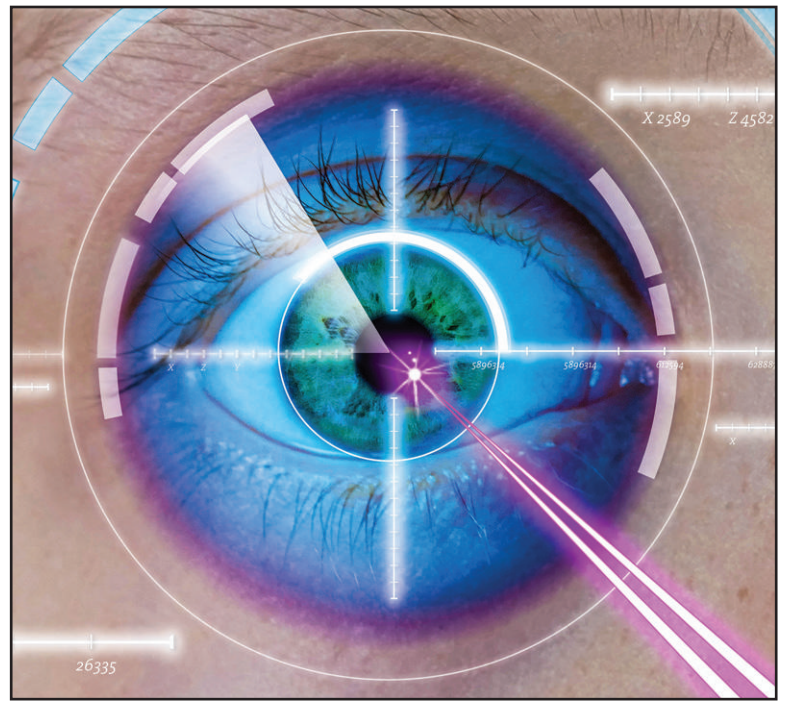
in children in America. Many eye injuries among school-aged children are attributed to sports. A study published in the journal JAMA Ophthalmology that was based on research from Johns Hopkins University, Harvard and other institutions found about 30,000 sports-related eye injuries are treated each year at emergency rooms participating in the Nationwide Emergency Department sample, which compiles information about millions of emergency room visits to more than 900 hospitals around the country. Data indicates that a large majority of these injuries occurred in people younger than 18, and a sizable number in children younger than 10. The situation is similar in Canada.

We believe that sports eye injuries are the largest cause of vision loss in children, said Keith Gordon, vice-president of research at CNIB, a Toron-

to-based nonprofit that provides support services for the visually impaired.

The NEI states that baseball is the sport responsible for the greatest number of eye injuries in children age 14 and younger. Basketball has the highest number of eye injuries for players between the ages of 15 and 24. Other sports that account for a high rate of eye injuries include softball, soccer and cycling.

Players, parents and coaches must realize that, according to the Coalition to Prevent Sports Eye Injuries, 90 percent of sports-related eye injuries can be avoided with the use of protective eyewear. Protective eyewear is often made of strong polycarbonate, which is 10 times more impact-resistant than other plastics. All children who play sports should wear protective eyewear, warn sports medicine experts. However, currently many youth



sports leagues do not require the use of such protection, making it the responsibility of parents and coaches to enforce this important safety protocol.

Protecting eyes when playing sports is of paramount importance for athletes of all

ages. More information about sports-related activities and protective eyewear is available at Vision Council of America ([www.thevisioncouncil.org](http://www.thevisioncouncil.org)) and Prevent Blindness America ([www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org)).

## Recognize and avoid youth sports injuries

Children benefit in various ways from their involvement in youth sports. Being part of a team fosters feelings of belonging, inspires collaborative play and strategy and can be an excellent form of exercise. Still, despite the benefits, parents often worry about the injury risk their children face on the playing fields.

Those fears are justified. A Safe Kids Worldwide survey of emergency room visits found that a young athlete visits a hospital emergency room for a sports-related injury more than a million times a year, or about every 25 seconds. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says more than 2.6 million children 0 to 19 years old are treated in the emergency department each year for sports- and recreation-related injuries.

Some of the more common injuries young children face have to do with the skeletal and muscular systems of the body. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons stresses that children's bones, muscles, tendons, and ligaments are still growing, making them more susceptible to injury. Fortunately, with some education, many youth-sport injuries can be prevented.

### Sprains and strains

Sprains are injuries to ligaments, or the bands of tough, fibrous tissue that connect two or more bones at a joint.

Strains impact a muscle or a tendon, which connects muscles to bones. Clinical research has linked acute strains and sprains to improper warm-up before sports, fatigue and previous injuries. Preparticipation conditioning and stretching can help reduce the risk of injury.

### Periostitis

Periostitis is commonly known as shin splints. This is an overuse injury that occurs in athletes who are engaged in activities that involve rapid deceleration. Periostitis causes inflammation of the band of tissue that surrounds bones known as the periosteum, and typically affects people who repetitively jump, run or lift heavy weights.

To head off potential pain in the shins, young athletes can gradually build up their tolerance for physical activity. Supportive shoes or orthotic inserts may also help. Incorporating cross-training into a regimen also can work.

### Repetitive use activities

Swimmers, tennis players, pitchers, and quarterbacks may experience something called a repetitive use injury. This is pain in an area of the body that is used over and over again. Inflammation of muscles and tendons may appear, but repetitive use injuries also may result in stress fractures, which the National Institute of Arthritis and

Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases defines as hairline fractures in bones that are subjected to repeated stress.

Rest between exercises can help alleviate these types of injuries. Ice, compression, elevation and immobilization may be used if pain is persistent.

### Growth plate injuries

Kids Health says growth plates are the areas of growing tissue near the ends of the long bones in the legs and arms in children and adolescents. A growth plate produces new bone tissue. If the growth plate is injured, it can-

not do its job properly. That may contribute to deformed bones, shorter limbs or arthritis.

Growth plate injuries most often result from falling or twisting.

While there's no surefire way to prevent growth plate injuries, getting proper and immediate care after an injury can help prevent future problems. An orthopedic surgeon has the expertise to diagnose and treat these injuries.

Youth sports injuries are common but preventable. Warming up, being in good physical shape and not overtaxing a growing body can help kids avoid pain and impairment.



Chase junior Lance Hinderliter (14) sneaks into the end zone during a practice last Thursday.

(photo by Jacob Macek/Chase High School)

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Central Plains' Taylor Oeser makes a pass during the Class 2A State Volleyball Championships in Emporia last October.

(photo by Mike Courson)



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