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## The role of school nurses

The health care industry leans heavily on nurses. Qualified nurses play integral roles in hospitals, assisted living facilities, private practices, and community health centers. Nurses also play vital roles in schools.

School nurses are valued members of both the medical and educational communities, and have been for more than a century. According to the National Association of School Nurses, the practice of school nursing dates back to 1902. Lina Rogers was the first school nurse, and she was hired as a means of combatting absenteeism. School officials felt Rogers could play a vital role in reducing absenteeism by helping students and their families understand their health care needs in relation to communicable diseases. And the role of school nurse has been evolving ever since.

### Advocacy

The NASN notes that school nurses act as advocates for individual students, working with them in promotion of self-management practices that enable students to manage their conditions and make life decisions. In addition, school nurses affect policy by serving as agents of change whose experience can be invaluable in health care reform and the implementation of new policies.

### Community health

Modern school nurses follow in the footsteps of Lina Rogers by educating students and their parents on a wide range of topics, including healthy lifestyles, preventive self-care, risk-reducing behaviors, and developmental needs. These efforts can help reduce the spread of communicable diseases, which can affect both the school and overall community. School nurses also can share information about local health care services and financial resources with local families who may have difficulty uncovering those services on their own.

### Care coordination

The NASN notes that school nurses can serve as case managers who coordinate student health care after working with physicians, families and school officials. School nurses can deliver care during the day by administering medication and performing routine treatments and procedures. School nurses also can educate their fellow educators about students' chronic conditions or special health care needs to ensure children's needs are effectively managed during the school day.

These are just a few of the roles school nurses play every day as they work to provide quality care for their students and protect the health of the communities in which those students reside.

## How parents can help athletes lower their injury risk

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Athletes are at risk of injury any time they step onto a field or court or into another competitive arena. Adults competing in sports may recognize that risk, but children often do not, which can make it difficult for young athletes to cope with injuries that prevent them from playing their favorite sports.

Stanford Children's Health notes that roughly 30 million children in the United States participate in some form of organized sports every year. Data from the Aspen Sports Institute indicates that youth sports participation in Canada has been in decline over the last decade. However, that same data indicates that more than 52 percent of girls between the ages of six and 12 and roughly 61 percent of boys in that same age group participate in organized sports in Canada.

Modern parents may not be as quick to encourage participation in certain sports as their own mothers and fathers were. That could be due to the increased availability of information about the long-term effects of injuries suffered in contact sports like football, field hockey and even soccer. For example, the risk of head injuries, and a growing amount of research as to the long-term ef-

fects of such injuries have led many parents to discourage their youngsters from participating in football.

Such decisions can be difficult. Parents who want their children to get all the benefits of organized sports participation can take steps to reduce young athletes' risk of injury.

- Schedule down time. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises parents to plan at least one day off from training per week and at least one month off from training per year. These breaks allow young bodies, even those who haven't suffered injuries, to recover.

- Increase flexibility. Stretching should be part of everyone's daily fitness routine, and young athletes are no exception. Stretching exercises after games and practices can increase flexibility. The Mayo Clinic notes that stretching may improve range of motion in the joints and decrease risk of injury.

- Make sure the right techniques are followed and the right gear is worn. The AAP advises parents to ensure kids follow the correct techniques when performing exercises. Poor form in the weight room can increase young athletes' risk of injury. Coaches of-

ten supervise strength-training regimens on campus, but parents should keep watchful eyes on youngsters who work out at home or without the supervision of a coach. The right gear, which includes protective cups, eyewear and mouthpieces, also should be worn at all times. Parents can periodically inspect gear to ensure it's not worn down.

- Discourage the attitude to "play through pain." Professional athletes often cite the necessity of playing through pain. But young athletes should never play through pain, as their bodies are still developing and could



suffer considerable damage if they try to play through injuries, however minor such injuries may seem.

Parents must work together with their children to reduce youngsters' risk of suffering sports-related injuries. More information about reducing youth sports injuries can be found at [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org).

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