

SPORTS-RELATED EYE INJURIES:

AN EDUCATIONAL FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS



Participating in sports and recreational activities is an important part of a healthy, physically active lifestyle for children. Unfortunately, injuries can, and do, occur. Children are at particular risk for sustaining a sports-related eye injury and most of these injuries can be prevented. Every year, more than 30,000 children sustain serious sports-related eye injuries. Every 13 minutes, an emergency room in the United States treats a sports-related eye injury.¹ According to the National Eye Institute, the sports with the highest rate of eye injuries are: baseball/softball, ice hockey, racquet sports, and basketball, followed by fencing, lacrosse, paintball and boxing.

Thankfully, there are steps that parents can take to ensure their children's safety on the field, the court, or wherever they play or participate in sports and recreational activities.

Prevention of Sports-Related Eye Injuries

Approximately 90% of sports-related eye injuries can be prevented with simple precautions, such as using protective eyewear.² **Each sport has a certain type of recommended protective eyewear, as determined by the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).** Protective eyewear should sit comfortably on the face. Poorly fitted equipment may be uncomfortable, and may not offer the best eye protection. Protective eyewear for sports includes, among other things, safety goggles and eye guards, and it should be made of polycarbonate lenses, a strong, shatterproof plastic. Polycarbonate lenses are much stronger than regular lenses.³

Health care providers (HCP), including family physicians, ophthalmologists, optometrists, and others, play a critical role in advising students, parents and guardians about the proper use of protective eyewear. To find out what kind of eye protection is recommended, and permitted for your child's sport, visit the National Eye Institute at <http://www.nei.nih.gov/sports/findingprotection.asp>. Prevent Blindness America also offers tips for choosing and buying protective eyewear at <http://www.preventblindness.org/tips-buying-sports-eye-protectors>, and <http://www.preventblindness.org/recommended-sports-eye-protectors>.

It is recommended that all children participating in school sports or recreational sports wear protective eyewear. Parents and coaches need to make sure young athletes protect their eyes, and properly gear up for the game. Protective eyewear should be part of any uniform to help reduce the occurrence of sports-related eye injuries. Since many youth teams do not require eye protection, parents may need to ensure that their children wear safety glasses or goggles whenever they play sports. Parents can set a good example by wearing protective eyewear when they play sports.

¹ National Eye Institute, National Eye Health Education Program, Sports-Related Eye Injuries: What You Need to Know and Tips for Prevention, www.nei.nih.gov/sports/pdf/sportsrelatedeyeinjuries.pdf, December 26, 2013.

² Rodriguez, Jorge O., D.O., and Lavina, Adrian M., M.D., Prevention and Treatment of Common Eye Injuries in Sports, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/2003/0401/p1481.html>, September 4, 2014; National Eye Health Education Program, Sports-Related Eye Injuries: What You Need to Know and Tips for Prevention, www.nei.nih.gov/sports/pdf/sportsrelatedeyeinjuries.pdf, December 26, 2013.

³ Bedinghaus, Troy, O.D., Sports Eye Injuries, http://vision.about.com/od/emergencyeyecare/a/Sports_Injuries.htm, December 27, 2013.