

School Sports: How Safe is Your Child?

The new school year has begun, and many children have already jumped into their fall sports programming - but just how prepared is your child or teen to participate in school sports? And more important, how can you ensure their safety throughout the season? While sports can be one of the best things about growing up, they come with inherent risks and dangers.

Dr. Drew Rogers, Morton Hospital orthopedic surgeon and sports medicine specialist, is the team physician for Taunton High School and Coyle Cassidy High School in Taunton and provides medical coverage for the schools' athletes throughout the season. Having extensive experience in sports medicine and working with athletes, Dr. Rogers says that preparation is key for any sport.

"Athletes should prepare for the season ahead of time," says Dr. Rogers. "It is important to be in shape and healthy before the start of the season, and this includes stretching and proper nutrition throughout the year. Sports are a great way to build confidence, social skills, and help maintain a healthy lifestyle. Have fun and play other sports when you have the chance. Cross training is a great way to stay in shape and avoid overstressing your body with one repetitive activity."

Dr. Rogers recommends that parents also be knowledgeable about their child's sport and communicate regularly with their team's coach to ask questions or raise any concerns.

"It's important that parents and their athletes know the rules and protective equipment required for each sport – and that their protective equipment is in good condition and fits properly," says Dr. Rogers. "In addition, coaches should be informed of any injuries the athlete has or is concerned about in order to keep the child safe and healthy and avoid further injury."

Some additional recommendations to consider before your child starts participating:

- Since playing sports means taking risks and possibly getting hurt, talk to the coach about potential dangers and how to prevent them.
- Find out in advance what the coach's emergency first-aid plan is if a child is injured.
- Check out the playing fields: Are they free from potholes, glass or other hazardous debris? Are goal posts padded?
- Find out what will be expected of your child physically, and make sure he or she is up to the challenge before practice begins. It's a good idea to take your child to the pediatrician for a physical first so you'll know whether your son or daughter is up for the demands of his or her chosen sport.

Before your child participates in sports, discuss the following with your pediatrician:

- **Heat stress.** All athletes - especially those who are overweight - are at risk in hot, humid weather. Know the signs of heat stress and ensure your child drinks enough fluids.
- **Cardiovascular problems.** Sports can be extremely dangerous if high blood pressure and heart conditions lie undiscovered.
- **Asthma.** If needed, long-acting treatments can usually help to safely keep your child active.

If your child requires medical attention for an injury or other sports-related condition, Morton Hospital's Emergency Department offers round the clock care to meet your needs. We offer 24-hour on-call orthopedic coverage, an ExpressMed department providing speedy and efficient care for minor sprains and injuries, and a pediatric observation unit, staffed by skilled pediatric nurses who can provide short-term medical care, observation, or additional treatment for your child as needed.

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