

Kids and Sports: Keeping Your Child Safe on the Field

Are you tired of coming home every day only to find your kids parked in front of the TV? It's time to get them up and moving and kicking and throwing. Organized sports improve fitness and coordination, foster friendships, and teach teamwork and self-discipline. And your child certainly will not be lonely; an estimated 20 million youngsters play organized sports outside school. Another 25 million play on school teams. A word of warning, however, before your future all-star or hall-of-famer hits the field: sports-related injuries are common among children.

It is estimated that up to 20 percent of children participating in sports activities experience injuries, one-fourth of which are serious. Many of these accidents can be prevented with some common sense and protective gear. First, check to make sure that your child's coaches are certified and trained in basic first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). There should be a first-aid kit and ice at all practices and games. Also insist that your child stretches before and after an activity.

Here are a few safety tips for three popular sports:

Baseball: Choose shoes with rubber rather than metal spikes. Pick a helmet with eye protection (polycarbonate shields). Breakaway bases can prevent leg injuries. Safety fencing near the dugouts and benches provides protection from foul balls. Sliding feet first, not head first, into bases should be mandatory. Pitching styles should be reasonably restricted to avoid potential injuries; for example, younger children should not throw curve balls.

Soccer: Shin guards are a must. Movable goals can be dangerous and should be secured to the ground. Children who have just started learning the game should be discouraged from heading the ball.

In-Line Skating: Children should wear pads on their elbows, wrists, and knees. The use of mouth guards can prevent dental injuries and cushion the blow of a fall that could otherwise cause a jaw fracture. Children should wear multisport helmets with a safety rating of N-94. Keep your child on smooth pavement and away from traffic.

By keeping these guidelines in mind, your children can have fun and be safe!