

Study asks how safe is high school football?

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A recent study finds high school football players are more likely to have serious, season-ending injuries than collegiate players. Credit: MediaSource

Football, one of the most popular sports in the United States, is also the leading cause of sports-related injuries. During the 2005-06 season, high school football players sustained more than half a million injuries nationally. A study conducted by researchers in the Center for Injury Research and Policy (CIRP) at Columbus Children's Hospital, is the first to compare injuries among high school and collegiate football players using a nationally representative sample.

According to the study, published in the August issue of *The American Journal of Sports Medicine*, four out of every 1,000 high school football exposures resulted in an injury, while eight out of every 1,000 collegiate football exposures resulted in an injury. Although National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football players were twice as likely to

sustain an injury as high school football players, high school football players sustained a greater proportion of season-ending injuries, fractures and concussions compared to collegiate football players.

“While football does have a high rate of injuries, injuries don’t have to be just part of the game,” said Christy Collins, MA, research associate in CIRP at Children’s Hospital and co-author of the study. “There are ways to reduce the number and severity of football injuries through targeted interventions. Because we observed high levels of ankle and knee injuries, we recommend increased conditioning of ankles and knees and rule changes aimed at protecting these vulnerable body sites. As most of the injuries to these regions were due to ligament sprains, targeted stretching exercises may also be beneficial.”

Running plays were the leading cause of injury in both high school and collegiate football, and in high school they accounted for the majority of season-ending injuries and concussions. Positions with the greatest risk of injury were running backs and linebackers.

Dawn Comstock, PhD, CIRP principal investigator, faculty member at Ohio State University College of Medicine and co-author of the study, suggested, “Additional instruction on appropriate tackling and blocking techniques as well as position-specific conditioning may help reduce the risk of injury during running plays.”

“Further research is required to identify those players most likely to be injured and examine what types of targeted efforts might prevent those injuries,” said Collins. “Also, there is a need for further analysis in the difference between high school and collegiate-level athletes and why high school players had greater proportions of the more severe injuries.”

Source: Columbus Children's Hospital

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