

Kids' ER concussion visits up 60 pct over decade

October 6 2011, By MIKE STOBBE , AP Medical Writer

(AP) -- The number of athletic children going to hospitals with concussions is up 60 percent in the past decade, a finding that is likely due to parents and coaches being more careful about getting head injuries treated, according to a new federal study.

"It's a good increase, if that makes any sense," said Steven Marshall, interim director of the University of North Carolina's [Injury Prevention and Research Center](#).

"These injuries were always there. It's not that there are more injuries now. It's just that now people are getting treatment that they weren't getting before," said Marshall, who was not involved in the new research.

Bicycling and football were the leading reasons for the kids' brain injuries, but [health officials](#) said that could be at least partly related to the popularity of those activities. For example, it's possible many more kids bike, so a larger number of bike-related injuries would be expected.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) study is based on a survey of 66 hospital emergency departments that was designed to be nationally representative. The [CDC](#) looked at non-fatal data for the years 2001 through 2009 for kids and teens ages 19 and younger.

The agency looked at traumatic brain injuries, a category of injuries that mostly counts concussions but also includes skull fractures and bleeding in the brain.

The estimated numbers of kids coming into ERs with these brain injuries rose dramatically, about 153,000 in 2001 to nearly 250,000 in 2009. The rate also rose, also by about 60 percent.

However, there was not a significant increase in the rate of kids who were immediately admitted into the main hospital for further treatment. That suggests that more so that in the past, more coaches and parents have been bringing kids to the ER with mild concussions and blows to the head, said Dr. Julie Gilchrist, a CDC [epidemiologist](#) who led the study.

That's probably due to more awareness of the formerly under-appreciated long-term hazards of concussions, she added.

In 2003, the CDC started a "Heads Up" youth concussion awareness campaign targeting doctors. Since then, the agency has expanded the focus to coaches and school officials.

That effort was bolstered by series of studies that began to appear around 2005 that showed damage in the brains of former National Football League players.

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