

Hockey rule changes could cut player aggression, injuries

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Evidence review looked at effects of league safety regulations.

(HealthDay)—Restrictions on body checking and other rule changes could limit aggression and reduce young hockey players' risk of injury, according to a new study.

Researchers at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto reviewed 18 studies that assessed efforts to reduce aggression-related injuries in hockey.

Thirteen of the studies evaluated rules meant to reduce aggression in minor hockey leagues in Canada and the United States. Eleven of the studies found that these rules lowered penalty or injury rates. There was a decrease of between one and six penalties per game and a threefold to 12-fold decline in injury rates.

Three studies found that educational programs had inconsistent effects on penalties and no significant effects of injury rates. Two studies found

that programs designed to change thinking in order to change behavior (called cognitive behavioral interventions) led to reductions in aggressive behavior.

"Rule changes essentially alter the culture of a sport and clearly define acceptable behavior for players, coaches, parents and officials," study author and [neurosurgeon](#) Dr. Michael Cusimano said in a hospital news release.

Although educational programs also can help reduce [aggressive behavior](#) and injuries to a certain extent, their effectiveness depends on the commitment of everyone involved and a simultaneous change in their attitudes, Cusimano noted.

The findings were published online in the [CMAJ](#) ([Canadian Medical Association Journal](#)).

There is an urgent need to find ways to control aggressive play in hockey, Cusimano said. He noted that brain injuries such as concussions are frequently caused by legal or illegal aggressive body checking, and account for 15 percent of all injuries to [hockey players](#) aged 9 to 16.

Up to one-quarter of players on some teams will suffer a concussion in a season, according to the release.

More information: The Nemours Foundation offers [safety tips for young hockey players](#).

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