

Expert pitches safety tips for young baseball players

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It's a great youth sport, but beware the possible injuries, doctor advises.

(HealthDay)—Baseball is one of the safest sports for children, but even so there are potential risks that can result in serious injury, an expert warns.

"All kids should be involved in physical activity, and baseball is a great, safe way to get kids exercising, help them develop eye/hand coordination, deepen [concentration skills](#) and learn how to work as a team," Dr. Jerold Stirling, a pediatric sports medicine specialist at Loyola University Health System, said in a Loyola news release.

"Still, parents and coaches need to be attentive to ensure all players and fans are safe during the game," added Stirling, who is also chair of the department of pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of

Medicine.

[Eye injuries](#) are a common hazard. Baseball is one of the leading causes of the nearly 40,000 eye injuries that occur from sports and recreational activities each year in the United States, according to background information in the news release.

"Children are especially vulnerable to eye [injury](#) because they don't have the same [depth perception](#)," Stirling explained. "Be especially careful if your child wears glasses. Make sure they wear protective lenses and consider a face shield for the batting helmet."

Eye injuries are most likely to occur when a batter is hit by a wild pitch, Stirling pointed out. He said coaches and parents should teach batters to turn their backs toward the ball and their heads away from the ball. This is especially important at younger ages, when pitching is more erratic.

Age 5 is the ideal time for a child to start playing baseball as part of a T-ball team, he noted.

"A child's hand/eye coordination and ability to concentrate really start to develop at age 5, and that can play a role in keeping kids safe while playing a game," Stirling said.

He also noted that pitchers and catchers are the players most likely to suffer injuries. "Pitchers tend to have more shoulder and [elbow injuries](#) due to overuse. Catchers tend to encounter the most traumas with foul balls being hit off their body and painful collisions at home plate," Stirling said.

In order to prevent injuries in young pitchers, it's important to teach them proper technique and to keep an eye on their pitch count, Stirling said. Children younger than 14 should not throw curve balls, and sliders

should not be thrown until a pitcher is 16 or older, he advised.

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

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