

New study shows most youth football player concussions occur during games, not practice

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Sports-related concussion has been referred to as an "epidemic" by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Emergency department visits for concussions have increased 62% between 2001 and 2009. Despite the lack of data regarding the rates of concussions in youth football (children aged 8-12 years), concerns have been raised about the sport being dangerous for this age group. In a new study scheduled for publication in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, researchers analyzed the incidence rates of concussion in youth football players in this age group and found a significantly higher incidence during games compared to practice sessions.

Anthony P. Kontos, PhD, and colleagues from the University of Pittsburgh and Cornell University studied 468 participants, 8-12 years of age, from 4 youth tackle football leagues, consisting of 18 teams. Player exposures were recorded for both games and practices. There were 11,338 total player exposures during the study period, with 20 medically-diagnosed concussions involving 20 different participants; 2 concussions occurred during practice and 18 occurred during games. Players aged 11-12 years were almost 3 times more likely to have a [concussion](#) than players aged 8-10 years. The majority of concussions involved helmet-to-helmet contact, and 95% involved players in skilled positions (e.g., running back, quarterback, linebacker). The incidence rate during games was approximately 2 times higher than previously reported, whereas the practice rate was comparable or even lower than previous findings. Overall, players were 26 times more likely to suffer a concussion in a game than in practice.

In the US, approximately 3 million youth participate in tackle football. In light of concerns regarding concussions, Pop Warner, the largest organized league with 425,000 participants, recently limited contact practice time to reduce concussions. However, contact practice time is when proper tackling technique can be taught and reinforced in a controlled environment. According to Dr. Kontos, "Limiting contact practice in youth football may not only have little effect on reducing concussions, but may instead actually increase the incidence of concussions in games via reduced time learning proper tackling in practice." A better approach to reducing concussions in youth football may be to focus on awareness and education among [youth football](#) administrators, coaches, parents, and players.

More information: "Incidence of Sport-Related Concussion among Youth Football Players Aged 8-12 Years," by Anthony P. Kontos, PhD, R.J. Elbin, PhD, Vanessa C. Fazio-Sumrock, PhD, Scott Burkhardt, PsyD, Hasani Swindell, BS, Joseph Maroon, MD, and Michael W. Collins, PhD, appears in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, [DOI 10.1016/j.jpeds.2013.04.011](#)

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