

Coaches can be a strong influence in preventing football injuries, say researchers

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Teaching coaches about injury prevention and contact restrictions pays off, say researchers who tracked injury rates among youth football players during the 2014 season.

"With an estimated three million youth aged 7 to 14 years old playing tackle football each year, preventing injuries is key. Our study showed that kids who received a comprehensive [education](#) from a coach had fewer injuries," said lead author Zachary Y. Kerr, PhD, MPH of the Datalys Center for Injury Research and Prevention.

Kerr and his team had athletic trainers evaluate and track injuries at each practice and game during the 2014 [football](#) season. Players were drawn from four states, including Arizona, Indiana, Massachusetts and South Carolina. Athletes were divided into three education groups: no coach [education program](#) (NHUF) (704 players), Heads-Up education and Pop Warner affiliation (HUF-PW) (741 players) and Heads-Up Only [players](#) (HUF) (663). The Heads-Up Football coaching education program was developed by USA Football and the Pop Warner Football program instituted guidelines to restrict contact during practice.

A total of 370 injuries were reported during 71,262 athlete exposures. Individuals in the HUF-PW and HUF groups had lower practice injury rates compared to those in the NHUF with 0.97/1000 athlete exposures and 2.73/1000 athlete exposures, respectively, versus 7.32/1000 exposures. The game injury rate for the NHUF group was 13.42/1000 athlete exposures while the HUF-PW was 3.42/1000 athlete exposures.

The game rates in the HUF and NHUF groups did not differ. Higher injury rates were typically found in those aged 11 to 15 years compared to those 5 to 10 years old. However, stronger effects related to Heads-Up education and Pop Warner affiliation were seen in the older group. The research was recently published in the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine*.

"Our findings support the need for additional coaching education and practice contact restrictions. Future research should look at how different programs work at various levels of competition and sports," said Kerr.

Provided by American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine

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