

Study finds flag football may be no safer than tackle football for young athletes

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There has been significant focus recently on injuries athletes sustain while playing sports. Much attention has been paid to rates of concussion in American football, and the long-term effects of repeated head injury. These reports have led many parents to wonder if putting their children in contact sports at an early age could be detrimental to their health by potentially put their children at risk for injury.

Eliminating tackling from football would seem like an alternative that could reduce exposure to injury in young athletes. Dr. Andy Peterson at the University of Iowa and Dr. Dr. Kyle Smoot, associate professor of Orthopaedic Surgery and Sports Medicine at the University of Kentucky, lead a study to prove or disprove the hypothesis that the rate of injury, including concussion, would be lower among [young athletes](#) competing in flag football compared to those in tackle football.

The results of that study, published in the Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine, were unexpected; injury was more likely to occur in youth flag football than in youth tackle football.

Though safety of football has been called into questions recently, there has been little research on the injury rates in youth sports and previous studies that aimed to focus on the issue used small samples or suffered from methodological limitations.

In the United States, approximately 2.8 million young people, aged six to 14 participate in youth football and sports-related injuries are the leading

cause of injury among children and adolescents.

Smoot, a co-collaborator on the study said, "this study questions what many parents may assume, that flag football is safer."

By knowing the true risk of injury, athletes and their parents can decide if the benefit of participating in a sport outweigh the risks. Smoot said "this study provides information so that parents and athletes can make informed decisions."

More information: Andrew R. Peterson et al. Youth Football Injuries, *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/2325967116686784](https://doi.org/10.1177/2325967116686784)

Provided by University of Kentucky

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