

Student-athletes don't have to be hit by injuries

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(HealthDay)—Most injuries to student-athletes occur during routine

practices, but only about a third of public high schools have a full-time trainer, according to the U.S.-based National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA).

"It's important to have the right sports safety protocols in place to ensure the health and welfare of student athletes," said Larry Cooper, chairman of NATA's secondary school committee. "By properly preparing for practices and competitions, [young athletes](#) can excel on the field and stay off the sidelines with potential injuries."

As spring season approaches, NATA recommends parents and students review their school's policies and procedures on sports-related injuries. Here's what to consider:

- **Who handles sports-related injuries?** Know who will care for athletes who are hurt during practice. Consider that person's experience and credentials, including first aid and medical training. Determine who makes medical decisions. Coaches and athletes may not make objective decisions about injuries and safety if they are concerned about winning.
- **What's the emergency action plan?** Every team should have a written plan detailing what to do if a serious injury occurs. An athletic trainer or first responder should review this plan.
- **Is all equipment in good working condition?** Sports equipment such as field goals, turf, basketball flooring and gymnastics apparatus should be examined to make sure it's safe. Medical equipment such as splints and spine boards should be checked routinely. Schools should have an automated external defibrillator (AED) and staff trained in its use.
- **Are high school coaches qualified?** All coaches, assistant coaches and team volunteers should undergo a background check. They should have knowledge in the sport they are coaching and all credentials required by the state and athletic

conference or league. Coaches should be trained to administer CPR, use an AED and provide first aid.

- **Are locker rooms and gyms sanitary?** These areas should be cleaned routinely to prevent the spread of bacterial, viral and fungal skin infections. Athletes should never share towels, athletic gear, water bottles, razors and hair clippers.

NATA says parents should also help ensure their teens are both mentally and physically prepared to play sports. This includes a preseason physical to identify any health conditions that could limit their participation. Young athletes shouldn't be pushed or forced to participate. Parents should make sure their child's school, coaches and other staff have a copy of his or her medical history as well as a completed emergency medical authorization form.

NATA recommends parents, student-athletes and coaches keep these safety tips in mind when spring training begins:

- **Acclimate gradually.** Athletes playing in hot weather should build up their endurance over one to two weeks. During this time, they should stay well hydrated and adjust their exercises according to weather. Athletes who must wear heavy protective equipment should gradually get used to playing in their gear. For example: wear only helmets on days one and two; then helmets and shoulder pads on days three and four, then full gear by day five.
- **Be aware of concussions.** Student-[athletes](#), coaches and school medical staff must be well educated on concussion prevention and management. Students with head injuries should speak up if they experience symptoms such as dizziness, loss of memory, lightheadedness, fatigue or trouble with balance.
- **Screen for sickle cell.** All newborns are tested for this inherited trait that can lead to blockage of blood vessels during intense

exertion. Athletes with sickle cell trait should take precautions. Warning signs include fatigue or shortness of breath.

- **Allow for recovery time.** The body needs to rest between seasons. Incorporating recovery time into the year can help prevent injuries. Repetitive motions can put excessive stress on joints, muscles or ligaments, resulting in injuries from overuse.

"It's critical that all members of a school's sports medicine team ([athletic trainers](#), physicians and school nurses) work together to help prevent, manage and treat injuries or illnesses should one occur," Cooper said in a NATA news release. "With a team approach we can reduce acute, chronic or catastrophic injury and ensure a successful season all around."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides more information on [children and sports safety](#).

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