

Most parents clueless about overuse dangers to young pitchers

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(HealthDay)—Before you sign your young pitcher up to play baseball in

multiple leagues, familiarize yourself with guidelines that can protect them against overuse injuries.

Sound obvious? A new survey shows it isn't, because most parents have no idea what those guidelines are.

Players under age 18 are pitching more and more frequently, often for several teams year-round, which is prompting a rise in injuries. Some even require Tommy John surgery to repair torn UCLs (ulnar collateral ligament), an operation most people associate with major league players rather than youngsters. The UCL is a ligament that runs on the inner side of the elbow to help support it when performing certain motions, such as throwing.

"It's really important that somebody is watching the players closely to make sure they aren't pitching too much so we can minimize the risk of [injury](#)," said senior study author Dr. Kevin Farmer, a University of Florida Health orthopedic surgeon who specializes in sports medicine.

"We've shown time and time again that kids who play more and throw more are at higher risk of injury," Farmer said in a university news release. "I think coaches, for the most part, understand the importance of tracking pitch counts. There is often just no way for them to know how much someone is pitching elsewhere, out of their sight. We all need to do a better job as specialists to get the word out there."

Good pitching mechanics, along with enforcement of rest periods and pitch counts, can help prevent overuse arm injuries in pitchers, the researchers noted.

But Farmer and his colleagues surveyed nearly 100 parents and caregivers of youth [baseball](#) pitchers in North Central Florida and found that 83% did not know about [safe pitching guidelines](#).

The lack of knowledge was found among parents/caregivers of players at all levels of experience, according to the paper published recently in the *International Journal of Sports Physical Therapy*.

Even among the respondents who were aware of safe pitching guidelines, many were unsure exactly what is in the guidelines.

These troubling findings likely extend beyond the region where the survey was conducted, the study authors added.

"It's really important that somebody is watching the players closely to make sure they aren't pitching too much so we can minimize the risk of injury," Farmer said.

Study lead author Dr. Christian Reintgen is a fifth-year orthopedics resident at the University of Florida. He said, "Safe pitching guidelines are in place to, first and foremost, protect your child and to protect the youth baseball players of America. With a big game coming up, a pitcher wants to play. But it is important to remember health has to come first and no one is going to do well if they suffer from repetitive [overuse injuries](#). They could end up in surgery."

The guidelines are available online, including on websites for the Little League, U.S. Baseball and even Major League Baseball, the researchers said.

More information: Learn more at [Pitch Smart](#).

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