Most parents want age limits on football tackling
1 April 2019, by Amy Norton, Healthday Reporter

(HealthDay)—With concern over concussion dangers rising, most U.S. parents now say that they would support bans on tackling in youth football, a new survey shows.

Researchers found that of more than 1,000 parents in a national sample, 60 percent were in favor of age restrictions on tackling. Another quarter were in the "maybe" camp.

But how would a tackling ban affect young players?

Tackling is responsible for many injuries in football, especially concussion, according to Chrisman. Age limits could prevent some of those injuries in younger kids—if the example of hockey is any indication. Head injuries in youth hockey dropped after the age limits on body checking were set, she noted.

Plus, Chrisman said, the ages of 8 to 13 are a period of rapid brain development, so it may make sense to be more cautious with those young players.

But if age limits seem like a no-brainer, there have been arguments against it, Chrisman pointed out. Some say that teaching young kids to tackle properly might prevent injuries later on, when they're bigger and stronger.

"There's been the question of, will we just delay concussions, and have even higher rates later on, when tackling is introduced?" Chrisman said.

There is no evidence that's the case, though, she
noted. Again, hockey offers an example: Injury rates in that sport suggest that early use of body checking does not prevent injuries later.

The goal is not to cast football, or youth sports, in a bad light, Chrisman stressed.

"Sports are a fun way to exercise, and they provide social support," she said. "We just need to continue thinking about ways to keep the game fun, and the amount of risk reasonable."

In fact, among kids under age 12, a greater percentage of concussions occur during play—like riding bikes or running around playgrounds—than during organized sports, said Dr. Cynthia LaBella.

LaBella, who wrote an editorial published with the study, is medical director of the Institute for Sports Medicine at Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

She said it's important for parents to be aware of signs and symptoms of concussion and when to seek medical help. But they should also keep the risk of sports-related concussions in perspective, she added.

Many parents in the latest study had an exaggerated perception of the risk: Most thought that more than 10 percent of high school football players suffered a concussion each season; one-quarter thought the rate topped 50 percent.

The real figure is estimated to be between 4 and 7 percent, according to LaBella. For younger kids, the rate is between 3 and 5 percent.

Those risks, LaBella said, have to be balanced against the potential benefits from playing team sports, including football. Those benefits include higher self-esteem and lower rates of obesity, diabetes, depression and substance abuse.

In recent years, news reports have highlighted cases of professional football players who sustained serious brain damage from repeated knocks to the head.

However, LaBella said it's less clear whether young kids who play tackle football face risks of mental