

Sports safety: it's not just child's play

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(HealthDay)—Playing sports offers plenty of fitness and other developmental benefits for kids, but injuries are common. Every year, more than 2.6 million U.S. children aged 19 and under are treated in the

ER for sports- and recreation-related injuries.

If your child plays [team sports](#), start by vetting the qualifications of the coaches.

A questionnaire-based study by the American Council on Exercise found common knowledge gaps among youth-sports coaches—many of whom are volunteers—in the areas of proper hydration, [strength training](#), nutrition and concussions. For instance, many didn't know about "second impact syndrome"—when a second concussion occurs before the first one has healed, a potentially fatal situation.

Make sure your kids learn and practice skills they need for their sport. Proper form helps prevent injuries. If your child isn't in condition for the activity or is new to it, he or she needs to start slowly, ideally by preparing in the off-season for at least four weeks. Developing strong legs in particular will help protect knees and ankles.

Check that your young athletes have—and wear—properly fitted protective gear appropriate for their activity, such as helmets to prevent concussions, wrist guards, knee or elbow pads. And regularly check that the equipment is in good condition.

Wearing a helmet is a must for:

- Batting and running bases in baseball or softball.
- Playing a contact sport, such as football or hockey.
- Riding a bike, snowmobile or ATV.
- Skiing and snowboarding.
- Using inline skates, a skateboard or scooter.
- Horseback riding.

Also, pay attention to the weather. Kids need time to adjust to heat and humidity when playing outdoors to avoid both [injury](#) and illness. Make sure they drink the right amount of water and are dressed for the conditions.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more detailed information for parents to help prevent [a traumatic brain injury](#) in kids of all ages.

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