

Protective eyewear can ward off injuries in young athletes

27 July 2012, By Ekaterina Pesheva

Doctors warn of spike in sports-related eye injuries with start of training season.

With the summer drawing to an end and the [school year](#) around the corner, pediatric eye specialists at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center and The Wilmer Eye Institute are sounding the alarm on a preventable yet all too common occurrence - [sports-related eye injuries](#).

August is Children's Eye Health and Safety Month, and pediatricians should counsel parents, coaches and young athletes about the dangers of eye injuries and urge them to consider protective goggles, especially for high-risk sports such as fencing, boxing, soccer, basketball, softball, lacrosse and baseball.

"As training season begins, and as children resume practice, emergency rooms across the country may see an influx of eye injuries from sports - yet most of these injuries are highly preventable by wearing protective goggles," says pediatric ophthalmologist Michael X. Repka, M.D., of the Johns Hopkins Wilmer Eye Institute and deputy director of ophthalmology at Hopkins Children's Center.

Worn consistently, safety eyewear can prevent nine out of 10 injuries, the experts say. Mild injuries, such as lid bruises and corneal abrasions, usually cause no lasting damage, but serious eye traumas can have lasting effects. For example, high-impact injuries can cause internal bleeding or fracture the bone around the eye, which may require surgery.

"Eye injuries at an early age can have serious and life-long consequences for the young athlete that go beyond missing a game or two and can sometimes lead to permanent eye damage and loss of vision," Repka says.

Eye injuries are the leading cause of blindness in

children in the United States with most eye injuries in school-age children occurring during sports according to the National Institutes of Health. Some 100,000 sports eye injuries occur each year, with children making up nearly half of the cases, research shows. In addition, children account for a third of all eye traumas requiring hospitalization according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Protective eyewear includes safety glasses, goggles, shields and eye guards. Regular prescription glasses do not offer adequate protection for most sports, the experts say, and all sports eyewear should be sports-specific. For children who wear prescription glasses, safety goggles can be custom-made to match the prescription, Repka says.

The Hopkins experts recommend the following steps to help minimize the risk for serious eye damage:

- Ensure that your child wears protective eyewear during practice and games
- Consult an ophthalmologist or an optometrist to determine which types of protective glasses are best suited for a particular sport
- Make sure your child has regular eye screenings and exams, if she or he has a problem.

Seek immediate medical attention if a child has any of the following:

- Cuts or punctures to the eye
- Redness, itching or irritation of the eyes
- Discharge or excessive tearing in one or both eyes
- Swelling of the eye or the area around the eye
- Deep eye pain, pain behind the eyes and/or unexplained headaches
- Floaters or flashes in the field of vision or partial loss of vision, which can be signs of possible

retinal detachment

A note of caution: Never rub the affected eye and do not try to remove any splinters or objects stuck in the [eye](#) because doing so may cause more damage. Go to the emergency room instead, the specialists advise.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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