Youth Sports Head Injuries: A Legislative Approach

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Head injury in youth sports is increasingly relevant to public health; policy is a viable option to mitigate the negative short- and long-term outcomes of head injury. The CDC estimates that U.S. emergency departments treat 175,285 sports-related traumatic brain injuries annually in individuals ages 19 and younger. This may be an underestimate, as many concussions in youth sports often go unreported and untreated, increasing the risk of long-term effects from repetitive head injury. To combat brain trauma in youth sports, all fifty states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation as of 2014. Previous research from Dr. Hosea A. Harvey, JD, of Temple University, examined these laws and found that much of the legislation is inconsistent and varies by state. The legislation primarily focuses on treatment and action plans after a head injury has already occurred. These laws are generally implemented through state athletic associations. A re-examination of the laws in combination with state athletic association concussion information sheets builds upon previous literature. In order to reduce negative effects of head injury in youth sports, the following improvements are suggested: develop more uniform and comprehensive concussion education for stakeholders (coaches, parents, athletes), create effective enforcement mechanisms for existing legislation, and implement measures such as limiting contact practices to reduce overall head injury incidence. Implementing these key aspects into existing state concussion statutes will greatly improve concussion prevention, education, and management.

**ABSTRACT**

Head injury in youth sports is increasingly relevant to public health; policy is a viable option to mitigate the negative short- and long-term outcomes of head injury. The CDC estimates that U.S. emergency departments treat 175,285 sports-related traumatic brain injuries annually in individuals ages 19 and younger. This may be an underestimate, as many concussions in youth sports often go unreported and untreated, increasing the risk of long-term effects from repetitive head injury. To combat brain trauma in youth sports, all fifty states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation as of 2014. Previous research from Dr. Hosea A. Harvey, JD, of Temple University, examined these laws and found that much of the legislation is inconsistent and varies by state. The legislation primarily focuses on treatment and action plans after a head injury has already occurred. These laws are generally implemented through state athletic associations. A re-examination of the laws in combination with state athletic association concussion information sheets builds upon previous literature. In order to reduce negative effects of head injury in youth sports, the following improvements are suggested: develop more uniform and comprehensive concussion education for stakeholders (coaches, parents, athletes), create effective enforcement mechanisms for existing legislation, and implement measures such as limiting contact practices to reduce overall head injury incidence. Implementing these key aspects into existing state concussion statutes will greatly improve concussion prevention, education, and management.

**WHAT IS A CONCUSSION**

A concussion is a type of mild traumatic brain injury, or mTBI, caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that can change the way your brain normally works. Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head to move rapidly back and forth.

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS**

- Dazed or stunned
- Disoriented
- Asymmetrical pupils
- Nausea
- Loss of consciousness
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Fatigue
- Light sensitivity
- Ringing in ears

**YOUTH SPORTS CONCUSSION BY THE NUMBERS**

**THERE ARE 30 MILLION YOUTH ATHLETES IN THE US**

1 OUT OF 10 YOUTH ATHLETES SUSTAINS A HEAD INJURY

70% OF THESE HEAD INJURIES OCCUR IN MALES

62% OF YOUTH SPORTS INJURIES HAPPEN DURING PRACTICE

ONLY HALF OF HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES REPORT THEIR HEAD INJURY

**STATUTES**

All fifty states and Washington D.C. have enacted youth head injury statutes. These statutes include three main tenets.

**EDUCATION**

44 OF 51 PARENT
36 OF 51 ATHLETE

**REMOVE FROM PLAY**

45 OF 51

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

42 OF 51

**PREVENTION**

- Limit contact in practice
- Trained referees
- Athlete and coach safety education
- Require helmets at all times
- Equipment checks
- Practice good sportsmanship

**ENFORCEMENT**

- Fines
- Coaching license revoked
- Coach education course completion

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