

CDC Finds 60 Percent Increase in Youth Athletes Treated for TBIs

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Greatest numbers of visits caused by bicycling, football, and playground activities

Emergency department visits for sports– and recreation–related traumatic brain injuries, including concussions, among children and adolescents increased by 60 percent during the last decade, according to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC experts believe much of the increase occurred because more adults realized the youngsters needed to be seen by health care providers.

Traumatic brain injuries, or TBIs, rose from 153,375 in 2001 to 248,418 in 2009, said the analysis in CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Bicycling, football, playground activities, basketball, and soccer were the primary sports involved, the study said.

“We believe that one reason for the increase in emergency department visits among children and adolescents may be a result of the growing awareness among parents and coaches, and the public as a whole, about the need for individuals with a suspected TBI to be seen by a health care professional,” said Linda C. Degutis, Dr.P.H., M.S.N., director of CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

During this eight–year period, approximately 173,285 children and adolescents (from birth to 19 years) were treated for non–fatal sports– and recreation–related TBIs each year in U.S. emergency departments.

The number of sports– and recreation–related TBI emergency department visits varied by age group and gender:

- 71.0 percent of all visits were among males
- 70.5 percent of visits were among persons aged 10–19 years
- Children from birth to 9 years commonly sustained injuries during playground activities or while bicycling.

Data for those aged 10–19 years varied also by activity and gender. Injuries among males most often occurred while playing football or bicycling. Females sustained injuries most often while playing soccer or basketball or while bicycling.

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Research indicates that young athletes with a TBI experience longer recovery times and are at greater risk of serious outcomes compared to adults. TBI symptoms may appear mild, but the injury can lead to significant life-long impairment affecting an individual's memory, behavior, learning, and/or emotions. Appropriate diagnosis, management, and education are critical for helping young athletes with a TBI recover quickly and fully.

“While some research shows a child's developing brain can be resilient, it is also known to be more vulnerable to the chemical changes that occur following a TBI,” said Richard C. Hunt, M.D., director of CDC's Division for Injury Response.

Over the last 10 years, as part of the Heads Up initiative, CDC has worked to raise awareness about TBI, including concussions, and improve prevention, recognition, and response to this injury among health care and school professionals, parents, coaches, and children and adolescents.

Most recently, with the support from the National Football League and CDC Foundation, CDC created a new online training to provide health care professionals with an overview of what they need to know about concussion among young athletes. In this course, health care professionals explore what happens to the brain and why young people are at increased risk. The goal of this course is to prepare health care professionals to diagnose and manage concussions on the sidelines, in their office, training room, or in the emergency department.

Available at no cost, this online course called, Heads Up to Clinicians: Addressing Concussion in Sports among Kids and Teens, was completed in collaboration with an expert work group and 13 leading medical organizations and includes a continuing education opportunity.

For more information about concussion, including educational materials and tools for health care and school professionals, coaches, parents, and athletes, visit www.cdc.gov/Concussion.

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