

A sports safety crisis in America

The nation's athletic trainers call to action

By The National Athletic Trainers Association

The Catastrophic Injury Protection Act of 2010 was introduced during the National Athletic Trainers Association Summit in January of 2010. NASSO fully supports this pending legislation and reprints in full the N.A.T.A.'s Call to Action.

There is a youth sports safety crisis in America. We see, hear and read about it every day, and recent studies point to a prolific increase in injuries despite our collective best efforts to prevent and treat them. Though they may at first seem minor, youth sport-related injuries can result in lifelong musculoskeletal or neurological conditions – or even prove fatal. Without proper legislation and appropriate health care professionals in place to ensure appropriate care, we are on the verge of a national injury epidemic.

Making this issue even more challenging, the national landscape is now emphasizing physical fitness to combat the incidence of obesity and diabetes in children. Happily, more kids are playing more sports, often “specializing” in one sport or one position – even playing year around. More girls are involved in sports, including competitive cheerleading, and the number of league sports and community opportunities to participate in athletics is on the rise.

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Yet physical activity is not without risk. The sports philosophy of “playing through pain” may result in a young athlete, eager to make a good impression, continuing or returning to play when sitting out or going home is essential. Too often, no one is present that is able to evaluate and manage injuries and conditions. In addition to the impact on the lives of youth athletes and their families, injuries are costly in terms of time lost from school and medical visits.

It is with this thinking, and a continued commitment to youth sports safety, that the National Athletic Trainers' Association has recognized this crisis and is poised to not only put a face on this issue, but to provide a call to action that will target widespread audiences with a need for legislative change to improve medical care. It is our plan to spearhead a summit in Sacramento that will include leading national health care and sports organizations also committed to this cause.

This safety crisis is evidenced by:

- There were 120 sports-related deaths in 2008-2009, in 33 states.
- Approximately 8,000 children are treated in emergency rooms each day for sports-related injuries.
- Among children, those aged 15-17 experience the highest



emergency room visits for sports injuries.

- Rates of sports injury visits to ERs were highest in remote rural settings.
- 50% of “second impact syndrome” incidents – brain injury caused from a premature return to activity after suffering initial injury (concussion) – result in death.
- The CDC reports that high school athletes suffer 2 million injuries, 500,000 doctor visits, and 30,000 hospitalizations each year.
- Female high school soccer athletes suffer almost 40% more concussions than males (29,000 annually).
- Female high school basketball players suffer 240% more concussions than males (13,000 annually).
- Concussion symptoms such as headache and disorientation may disappear in 15 minutes, but 75% of those tested 36 hours later still had problems with memory and cognition.
- 400,000 brain injuries (concussions) occurred in high school athletics during the 2008-09 school year.
- There are 5 times as many catastrophic football injuries among high school athletes as college athletes. 15.8% of football players who sustain a concussion severe

enough to cause loss of consciousness return to play *the same day*.

- History of injury is often a risk factor for future injury, making prevention critical. 62% of organized sports-related injuries occur during practices.
- Only 42% of high schools have access to athletic training services.
- 47% of schools nationally fall short of the federally recommended nurse-to-student ratio. Many schools have no nurse at all.

CALL TO ACTION

These statistics DEMAND an immediate and reasoned response. **The Alliance to**

Address the Youth Sports Safety Crisis in America asks every concerned citizen to take the following actions:

- Ensure that youth athletes have access to health care professionals who are qualified to make assessments and decisions.
- Educate your family about the symptoms of musculoskeletal and neurological injuries (concussion, heat illness, ACL injuries).
- Ensure pre-participation physicals before play begins.
- Ensure sports equipment and field are checked for safety and best conditions.
- Write to your state legislator,

expressing your concerns.

- Support further research into youth sports injuries and their effects.

There's a difference between pain and injury – work to eliminate the culture of “playing through pain” without assessment.

On January 10th, 2010, both the NATA and CATA spearheaded the [Alliance to Address the Youth Sports Safety Crisis in America](http://www.youthsportssafetyalliance.org/) with the support of 29 leading health care and sports organizations. Visit <http://www.youthsportssafetyalliance.org/> for more information.

For more information about the CATA, visit <http://www.ca-at.org>.