

[IMAGE]

Youth Football Earns an Extra Point

About 1.5 million people play football, from Pee Wee and Pop Warner right up to the professional ranks. An estimated 1.2 million of these players are injured each year. The majority of studies on football injuries concentrate on high school students or older athletes. How dangerous is youth football compared to collegiate and professional ball?

All players in a youth football league of grades 4-8 were followed for an entire fall season to gather injury data. Researchers tracked more than 40 teams and almost 1,000 players age 14 or younger, and recorded all injuries during games that removed a player from the game or required a physician. Injuries were rated severe (removed from play over 14 days), moderate (return to play in 4-14 days), or mild (return within three days).

Overall, only 6% of players suffered some injury over the season; over 90% of these were considered mild. The most common injuries were bruises, which accounted for 60% of all injuries, followed by muscle strains and ligament sprains. Seven percent of the injuries removed players for the remainder of the season due to their severity, representing less than 1% of all the players.

It appears that youth football may be no more dangerous than other children's sports, but there are still signs you're your child may be at a higher risk. Players were more likely to be injured if they were older and heavier: Eighth graders were four times as likely as fourth graders to be injured. Offensive players, especially running backs, were also prone to injury.

Reference:

Stuart MJ, Morrey MA, Smith AM, et al. Injuries in youth football: A prospective observational cohort analysis among players aged 9 to 13 years. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 2002;77, pp. 317-322.

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