



Concussions in Youth Sports: Safeguarding the Health of Future Athletes

Background

Concussions in youth sports represent a critical issue impacting the well-being and safety of young athletes across the United States. A concussion, a form of traumatic brain injury, occurs due to a blow, bump or jolt to the head, disrupting brain function. Despite heightened awareness, the prevalence of concussions among young athletes remains a pressing concern.

According to a 2018 study by Chrisman et al. published in the *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine*, high school athletes alone account for approximately 300,000 sports-related concussions annually. However, this number may be significantly higher due to underreporting and undiagnosed cases, especially in non-school affiliated sports.

Concussions are prevalent across various sports, including football, soccer, basketball, hockey and wrestling. Factors contributing to the risk of concussion include the physicality of sports, inadequate protective gear, improper playing techniques and insufficient protocols for identification and management.

Research has demonstrated both short- and long-term consequences of concussions in young athletes. Short-term effects include headaches, dizziness, confusion and cognitive impairments, as highlighted in a 2019 meta-analysis by Ellis et al. in *JAMA Pediatrics*. Furthermore, concerns about a potential link between repetitive concussions and chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) have been raised in studies, such as the work by Mez et al. published in *Neurosurgery* in 2018.

Despite efforts to address concussions, there is a need for comprehensive measures. Preventing and managing concussions in youth sports requires improved education, evidence-based protocols, advancements in protective equipment and changes in sports regulations.

ACSM Position

The American College of Sports Medicine® (ACSM) asserts that concussions in youth sports demand urgent attention. Scientific evidence underscores the imperative of safeguarding the health of young athletes. By implementing evidence-based measures and policies, such as enhanced education on concussion recognition, strict adherence to return-to-play guidelines and advancements in protective gear, ACSM advocates for the continued well-being of young athletes.