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Article

Batted Balls Threaten High School Baseball Players **High school athletes should wear head protection, study says**

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THURSDAY, June 5 (HealthDay News) -- Most high school baseball players should wear headgear on the field to protect them from injuries from batted balls, a new study suggests.

At the very least, players should consider wearing mouth guards, said study author Christy Collins, although she acknowledges that changing the culture of baseball may be a challenge.

"We really want to make sure kids keep participating in sports, we just want them to be as safe as possible," said Collins, a research associate at the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

Nearly 500,000 males play baseball at U.S. high schools each year, according to background information for the study. (Females typically play softball.)

Collins and a colleague examined the results of a survey of injuries in athletic programs at 100 high schools across the country, from 2005 to 2007.

A total of 431 baseball injuries were reported for every 341,000 "athletic exposures," each defined as one athlete playing in a practice or game. This produced a rate of 1.26 injuries per 1,000 exposures.

The shoulder was the most commonly injured body part (17.6 percent of injuries), followed by the ankle (13.6 percent) and the head or face (12.3 percent).

Fifty of the injuries were caused by players being hit by batted balls, and nearly two-thirds of those balls were to the head/face and mouth/teeth. Nearly one in five batted ball injuries required surgery, the study revealed.

"We found that not only were pitchers at risk of being hit by a batted ball, but also batters were at risk as well as infielders," Collins said.

Based on their findings, the study authors recommend that pitchers, batters and infielders wear helmets with face shields. At the least, the players -- especially pitchers -- should wear mouth guards to protect their teeth, Collins said.

"It's not widely accepted at the high school level to wear that type of protective equipment, although we know mouth guards are effective, and they're widely available," Collins said.

It's not clear why baseball players don't use better protective equipment now, Collins said. "We really need to do more research to see if it's just that people don't know the risks of these types of injuries, or they're unaware that mouth guards or face guards could prevent these, or if it's the culture of the sport. We realize that would be very difficult to change."

The findings are published in the June issue of *Pediatrics*.

Dr. James Linakis, associate director of pediatric emergency medicine at Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence, R.I., said, "The recommendations regarding face protection cannot be emphasized strongly enough."

"As a pediatric emergency physician, one of the most common baseball injuries that I see is eye injuries from batted or thrown balls, and dental injuries are also quite common. These injuries have the potential of being serious or even permanently disabling, yet they could be easily prevented," he said.

Children should begin using equipment to protect the head and face early on, Linakis said. "If we insist that young athletes wear facial protection from the time that they play T-ball, it will be second nature to them by the time they reach high school and college."

More information

Learn more about baseball injuries from the [National Athletic Trainers Association](#).

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