



## Kids gymnastics among riskiest sports

Study: Rate of catastrophic injuries similar to those seen in ice hockey

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NEW YORK - The rate of injuries among young gymnasts is on a par with the high injury rates in sports considered to be much more dangerous, according to the first study to look at national rates of pediatric gymnastic injuries in the US.

"Most people don't realize that gymnastics can be such a dangerous sport," the study's lead author, Dr. Lara B. McKenzie of the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, told Reuters Health. The rate of catastrophic or career-ending injuries seen in gymnastics is actually similar to that of ice hockey, she noted.

McKenzie and her colleagues looked at data on children 6 to 17 years old treated in United States emergency departments nationwide for gymnastics-related injuries between 1990 and 2005. The sample represented an estimated 425,900 total injuries during that time period.

Half of injuries in 6- to 11-year-olds involved fractures or dislocations of the upper extremities, the researchers found, while lower extremity strains and sprains accounted for just over half of injuries in 12- to 17-year-old athletes. Forty percent of all injuries occurred at schools, while younger children were more likely than older athletes to be injured at home.

Older athletes were more likely to have been injured while doing a difficult skill such as a handspring or flip than younger athletes, and they were about twice as likely to suffer injuries overall as the younger children.

The overall injury rate of 4.8 per 1,000 participants is similar to injury rates for soccer, basketball and cheerleading, McKenzie and her team note in their report.

The number of injuries fell from 28,700 in 1990 to 21,500 in 2005. "This could be due to a number of things, but possibly increased attention to the sport, the use of more effective safety equipment," McKenzie said. "But the bottom line is there's still more to do" to reduce injury rates among young gymnasts, she added.

"What doesn't exist right now is a set of uniform rules and regulations for gymnasts, coaches, spotters and trainers," McKenzie pointed out.

The investigators note that the first step is to establish a national database for gymnastic-related injuries to identify specific risk factors. This would assist in the development of evidence-based guidelines to prevent injuries in the sport.

She urged parents to make sure any gymnastics program their child participates in is "well established and reputable," with coaches, spotters and trainers who have undergone safety training. And, she added, children should never do gymnastics unsupervised.

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