



**SMARTPLAY**

## **Safer sport with new children guidelines**

Sport and physical activity is a vital component of achieving good health. By undertaking a minimum of 60 minutes of activity per day children and young people will not only reduce their risk of chronic illness, mental illness and obesity but also develop healthy lifestyles, friendships, life skills and a strong sense of belonging and community.

However, statistics have shown that more than one-quarter of parents/carers of children aged 5-12 years have discouraged or prevented children from playing sport (34.7% for boys and 16.6% for girls) because of injury and safety concerns.

This does not have to be the case though with more than 50 per cent of all injuries able to be prevented.

To help in the prevention of sports injuries, Smartplay, Sports Medicine Australia's sports injury prevention program funded by VicHealth and the Department of Planning and Community Development (Sport and Recreation Victoria), has developed *Safety Guidelines for Children and Young People in Sport and Recreation* to provide schools, teachers, coaches, parents, administrators and officials with the knowledge on how to ensure sport and recreation is safe.

The guidelines explain (in greater detail) that safety can be achieved in some of the following areas:

### **Prevention strategies including the environment, equipment, grounds and facilities**

Some examples include:

*Weather conditions should be assessed before, during and after activity regularly and activity modified or cancelled where appropriate*

Children and young people (in particular thin/lean children) are susceptible to illness in cold weather as they lose body heat more easily. Guardians should pay particular attention to children and young people playing water sports or activities subject to wet conditions because water increases the loss of body heat.



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In hot conditions, adequate shade and sunscreen should be available and all participants should have appropriate clothing, hats and sunglasses to prevent overexposure to the sun.

It is also important to have flexibility from competition rules about clothing to allow children and young people to feel more comfortable in extremely cold or hot weather. This includes allowing tracksuit pants in cold weather or hats when hot, even if they are not part of regulation uniform.

*Protective equipment should be fitted correctly and worn during training and competition*

When children are active, equipment should be:

- Suited to the size and ability of the participant.
- Regularly checked and maintained.
- Padded as appropriate.
- Properly erected/constructed.
- Used at all times – training and competition.
- Sport specific.

Protective gear such as mouthguards, helmets, footwear, gloves, protective padding, eyewear, strapping and taping should also be worn dependant on the sport being played.

*Grounds and facilities need policies and plans for injury prevention*

Grounds and facilities should be regularly checked by an appropriate nominated person to ensure they are safe to use. Some things to check for include:

- The playing surface is in reasonable condition without holes, exposed sprinkler heads or hard patches.
- Corner posts or other field posts cannot injure participants on contact.
- Permanent fixtures such as goal posts are padded.
- Matting is adequate where necessary, like gymnastics.

### **Record keeping, managing illness and medical conditions**

Some examples include:

*Good use of pre-participation screening information by schools, clubs, officials and coaches is important for injury prevention*



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To plan safe, beneficial and appropriate activities, teachers and coaches must know the relevant medical history of all participants as well as family, school, and other sporting and social commitments. This information needs to be reviewed regularly, communicated to people who need to know and available in case of an emergency.

*Medical information should be collected in conjunction with the Privacy Act and consideration should be taken as to who has access to the information*

Types of information that may be collected include athlete medical forms, consent for collection of images, and asthma management plans. It is also important to respect the privacy of all participants' information, that the participant is aware of who will have access to their information and, that access complies with privacy law.

*Any child taking prescription medication should have a clearance from the treating doctor before participating in sport or physical activity*

Children and young people should not participate in sport when ill or recovering from a viral illness with symptoms such as fever or a higher than normal body temperature in the previous 24 hours.

When assessing whether a child should participate in physical activity the following should be remembered:

- The child should not participate if the symptoms are general (e.g. temperature, aches, pains, general muscular tiredness).
- For uncomplicated upper respiratory tract symptoms, such as a runny nose or sneezing, the child should be allowed to participate for 10-15 minutes. The child's condition should then be reassessed, and if they feel unwell, or are obviously struggling to keep up, then they should not continue to participate.

### **Considerations for participation**

Some examples include:

*Well planned, varied and simple game-based activities should make up the majority of training sessions for young participants*

Training should focus on activities, practices and games incorporating fundamental movement activities some of which are basic to all movement such as running, jumping and others more specific to the sport or activity such as passing, catching, kicking, supporting and rolling. An introduction to evasion and contact techniques can be progressively introduced through simple drills, sequenced activities, and small group games.



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Fitness activities at training should be appropriate to the stage of the season and participant's age/fitness levels. For example beginner level running can develop via running based games. A games-based approach to running more closely resembles the stop start nature of children and young people's play and is more likely to be a more positive experience than running laps of an oval or court.

*Warm ups help participants mentally and physically prepare and cool downs assist in recovery*

A warm up aims to:

- Prepare the mind and body for the activity.
- Increase body temperature.
- Increase heart rate.
- Increase breathing rate.

The warm up should include activities that use the same movement patterns as the activities to be performed during the session. Warm up exercises should begin at a low intensity and gradually increase to the level required in the activity.

Participants should also do a cool down routine at the end of every activity session consisting of activity of significantly reduced intensity, such as 2-3 minutes of easy jogging or walking.

*The frequency of participation should be monitored to avoid overuse injuries*

Overuse injuries, such as tendonitis or muscle soreness caused by excessive and/or repetitive use, are preventable.

Coaches and teachers should be mindful that talented young participants may be involved in multiple sports, in the same sport at different levels of representation and be undertaking multiple training sessions per week.

Teachers and parents of active young participants also have a responsibility to communicate with coaches to help manage these demands to prevent athlete burnout, overtraining and/or under recovery.

*Careful grouping of young participants is a basis for safe and fair play*

Balanced competitions are important to reduce the risk of injury.



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In junior contact sports the grouping of children and young people by age group is not always the best way of establishing a balanced competition. Use common sense – consider age, size, gender, strength, skill, experience, attitude to competition, and psychological (emotional and social) maturity of the participants.

Using modified rules and playing modified games can also decrease the risk of injury for young participants.

*Have properly trained personnel*

To create a safe environment it is crucial to have qualified coaches and trained teachers who have:

- At least an entry level coaching accreditation
- Completed a safety focused course such as sports trainer or sports first aid course.

**These examples plus more (of which are explained in greater detail within the new guidelines) will ensure a safer sporting environment and hopefully break down the barrier to participation due to fear of injury.**

**For more advice on keeping junior sport and recreation safe for children and young people download Smartplay's *Safety Guidelines for Children and Young People in Sport and Recreation* at [www.smartplay.com.au](http://www.smartplay.com.au) or for a free copy email [smartplay@vic.sma.org.au](mailto:smartplay@vic.sma.org.au) or call 03 9674 8777.**