



Contacts: **Robin Waxenberg**
212-489-8006 (o); 917-301-1350 (c)
robin@robwax.com

Ellen Satlof, NATA
214-637-6282, ext. 159
ellen@nata.org

**“ALLIANCE TO ADDRESS THE YOUTH SPORTS SAFETY CRISIS IN AMERICA”
SUMMIT RAISES AWARENESS OF
HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY OF YOUTH ATHLETES**

National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) and 29 other leading health care and sports organizations call for legislative change to improve medical care;

Summit speakers offer insights and strategies to reduce the number of serious athletic injuries and illnesses

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., January 12, 2010 – As part of an ongoing effort to reduce the catastrophic athletic injuries and illnesses among young athletes in the United States, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) spearheaded the Alliance to Address the Youth Sports Safety Crisis in America with the support of 29 other leading health care and sports organizations. The group's summit in Sacramento today is designed to raise awareness about youth sports safety and promote legislation to improve health care for young athletes.

With nearly 7 million high school students participating in sports today, there are a reported 715,000 high school sports-related injuries each year, and 8,000 children are treated in emergency rooms each day for sports-related injuries. “Because youth athletes today continue to play more sports, or one sport at a more intense level of play, they are experiencing chronic and sometimes catastrophic injuries that could sideline them for a season or even a lifetime,” said Marjorie J. Albohm, MS, ATC, president of NATA. “Every day we hear about brain injuries and concussion, sudden cardiac arrest and exertional heat illnesses, among other conditions, experienced on the youth sport playing field. Many are preventable and treatable if the athlete has access to the right health care professionals.”

Recent studies point to a significant increase in catastrophic injuries that result in death or permanent disability, despite best efforts to prevent and treat them. In fact, there were at least 115 sports-related deaths in 33 states over the past two years. Brain injury, devastating heat illness and sudden cardiac arrest are just a few of the serious conditions suffered by children on the playing field. The traditional sports philosophy of “playing through pain” can result in younger athletes, who are eager to make a good impression, continuing or returning to the playing field, when sitting out or going home would be the safer and more logical course of action.

Call to Action

The Alliance to Address the Youth Sports Safety Crisis in America urges parents, teachers, coaches, athletic trainers and other school personnel to take the following actions:

1. Ensure that youth athletes have access to health care professionals who are qualified to make assessments and decisions.
2. Educate your family about the symptoms of musculoskeletal and neurological injuries (concussion, heat illness, ACL injuries).
3. Ensure pre-participation exams before play begins.
4. Ensure sports equipment and playing surfaces are checked for safety and best conditions.
5. Write to your state legislator, expressing your concerns.
6. Support further research into youth sports injuries and their effects.
7. There's a difference between pain and injury – work to eliminate the culture of “playing through pain” without assessment.

Summit Speakers Highlight Prevention and Treatment

Michael West, MS, ATC, athletic trainer and assistant principal at Patriot High School in Riverside, Calif., served as moderator of the event. West is also current president of the California Athletic Trainers' Association and has spearheaded legislation calling for a defined scope of practice for athletic trainers in the state.

“If our young athletes don't have immediate and appropriate care, the results not only affect the quality of life of younger athletes, but they are also costly in terms of time lost from school and costs of treatment,” he said. “That is why we're coming together to call for legislative changes to improve medical care for young athletes.”

Assemblymember Mary Hayashi, California's 18th Assembly District, who chairs the Assembly's Business and Professions Committee and is a strong health care advocate, and Rep. Elaine Smith from Idaho's 30th House District, who is committed to protecting children, both attended the summit seeking solutions to this national crisis.

Robert Burger, MD, a Sacramento-based orthopaedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine, addressed the importance of preventing musculoskeletal trauma and life-long injuries and disabilities. As a representative of the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine, he discussed the organization's Sports Trauma and Overuse Prevention program (STOP).

Cindy J. Chang, MD, former head team physician for the University of California's 27 athletic teams and assistant clinical professor at UC Davis and UC San Francisco, focused attention on sudden cardiac arrest and the need for automated external defibrillators. She was joined by Diane Claerbout, a board member of Parent Heart Watch, the national voice dedicated to protecting youth from sudden cardiac arrest and sudden cardiac death. Claerbout lost her son Johannes (Jos) in 1999 due to sudden cardiac arrest from sports.

Rebecca A. Demorest, MD, associate medical director of pediatrics and young adult sports medicine at Children’s Hospital Oakland discussed how to recognize the signs and symptoms of exertional heat illness (EHI) and ways to prevent and reduce its incidence. She was followed by Brendon P. McDermott, PhD, ATC, assistant professor, graduate athletic training program, from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, who provided real-world case studies on EHI to illustrate just how prolific and dangerous this syndrome has become.

Leigh Steinberg, a nationally acclaimed sports attorney and the inspiration for the film, “Jerry McGuire,” discussed the need for appropriate health care access for athletes at all levels. Steinberg has represented 150 professional and Olympic athletes and has seen how concussion can sideline an athlete from play and how critical proper diagnosis and treatment are to ensure a safe return to play.

Kevin M. Guskiewicz, PhD, ATC, Keenan distinguished professor and chairman, department of exercise and sports science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, provided in-depth information about concussions and brain injuries and the fact that incidence is actually higher than athletes report. He discussed how repeat concussions can be prevented and that there must be a focus on research and prevention of the first occurrence.

One of the highlights of the summit was when Beth Mallon, the founder of Advocates for Injured Athletes, spoke of her and her son’s personal experience with an on-the-field injury. Her son, Tommy Mallon, also spoke about his firsthand experience as a San Diego high school lacrosse player who was playing in his final game just seven months ago. He collided with a player while heading downfield after a ground ball. He was spineboarded and taken by ambulance to a nearby hospital and told he fractured his neck and would never play sports again.

In addition to NATA, the Alliance to Address the Youth Sports Safety Crisis in America comprises 29 other groups, including the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine and the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine. Each of these organizations has helped to underwrite the cost of the morning program. ImPACT, a research-based software tool used for the evaluation of concussion recovery, was instrumental in making sports attorney and agent Leigh Steinberg available as a speaker.

For more information, please visit www.nata.org and www.youthsportssafetyalliance.org.

National Athletic Trainers’ Association (NATA) – *Health Care for Life & Sport*: Athletic trainers are health care professionals who specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and illnesses. The National Athletic Trainers’ Association represents and supports 30,000 members of the athletic training profession. Only 42 percent of high schools have access to athletic trainers. NATA members adhere to a code of ethics. NATA supports the right of all patients to have equal access to the services of athletic trainers through the Athletic Trainers’ Equal Access to Medicare Act (H.R. 1137). Visit www.nata.org

###

