



Cheerleading provides one of a great many opportunities for young men and women to display their athletic talents as well as develop teamwork and leadership skills that will help them in the future. As with any athletic endeavor, it is not without risk. According to recent studies, cheerleading ranks fourth in catastrophic injuries per person and in emergency room visits per person amongst female athletes.

Cheerleading is a unique hybrid activity that blends the leadership and support roles cheerleaders are intended to fill on the sidelines with the athleticism of the stunts, pyramids and gymnastic skills they perform.

To help minimize risk in cheerleading, the AACCA developed the first Cheerleading Safety Manual and Risk Management Course in 1990 and updated as recently as 2006. It has received praise from the National Athletic Trainers Association, National Association of Secondary School Principals, USA Gymnastics, the NCAA, and the National Federation of State High School Associations.

Recent attempts to classify school-based cheerleading as a “sport” have met with limited success in reducing this risk and sometimes have resulted in increased risk due to increased exposures. The majority of state high school associations have used a modified version of defining cheerleading as a sport or an “athletic activity” in order to add the necessary requirements to reduce the risk of participation. However, there are still states where there is little or no support or regulation of cheerleading programs. We call on those state associations to provide the necessary support to these young athletes regardless of the term used to classify cheerleading.

Our partnership with the NCAA at the college level has shown that requiring safety education and adherence to rules is the key to lowering the risk of injury to cheerleaders. Since the NCAA started requiring coaches training and education in 2006, it has not had any catastrophic injury claims from cheerleading. Regardless of the term used to classify cheerleading, cheerleaders are not always supported as they should. Every cheerleading program should have the following requirements:

- Follow established performance rules like those provided by the AACCA for school teams and the US All Star Federation for all-star programs.
- Supervision by a qualified coach that has completed a risk management course like that provided by the AACCA.
- Have access to appropriate medical supervisory staff such as an athletic trainer.
- Practice and perform in an area appropriate for athletic performance.
- Have a practiced Emergency Action Plan in the event of a severe accident, cardiac failure or other medical or weather-related emergency.

Since 1987, the AACCA has been working with organizations such as the NCAA, NFHS, and US All Star Federation to help minimize the risk of participation through the rule-writing process and educational training courses. We are proud to join NATA in the Alliance to Address the Youth Sports Safety Crisis in America and look forward to furthering the cause of safety in youth sports and athletics.