



December 28, 2009

The American Medical Society for Sports Medicine (AMSSM) is pleased to join the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) and other leading health care and sports organizations in the Alliance to Address the Youth Sports Safety Crisis in America.

Founded in 1991, the AMSSM is now comprised of over 1500 Sports Medicine Physicians whose goal is to provide a link between the rapidly expanding core of knowledge related to sports medicine and its application to patients in a clinical setting. Our multi-disciplinary organization of sports medicine physicians have primary specialty training in family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine, and physical medicine and rehabilitation, with additional expertise in sports medicine, including fellowship training and serving as team physicians in our communities and nationally.

As the largest organization of primary care sports medicine physicians in the world, our members are ideally suited to provide comprehensive medical care for our young athletes. This starts with preventative care such as exercise and nutritional counseling and pre-participation physicals, to the management of illnesses and injuries that can affect participation in sports, including return to play concerns.

There are an increasing number of children active in organized sports programs in the United States, currently estimated at >30 million and growing. Adolescent girls are the fastest growing segment; there were 300,000 high school female athletes in 1972 and 2.4 million by 2000. Yet still only 21% of our teens participate in moderate sports or recreation 5-6 days per week.

Therefore, we applaud and continue to encourage our youth to engage in physical activity and competitive sports. One-fifth of our children ages 13-17 are overweight. Studies have shown that sports participation among our high school students is associated with numerous positive health behaviors (e.g., better diet) and few negative health behaviors (e.g., drug use). Frequent participation in sports after school hours in adolescence is associated with a high level of physical activity in adulthood, which helps to prevent chronic disease later in life.

Yet physical activity is not without risk, and as the numbers of children participating in sports increase, so has the number of sports-related injuries. Sports are the leading cause of injury and hospital emergency room visits in adolescents. Almost 1/2 of non-fatal injuries seen in the emergency department in children ages 5-17 were sports-related. While injuries to muscles and bones remain prevalent and can lead to life-long disability, concussion, heat illness and cardiac arrest are also among the serious conditions suffered by children on the playing field.

AMSSM has consistently taken a leadership role in the prevention and recognition of injuries and illnesses in young athletes. Most recently, our members were active contributors to the 2008 publication "Selected Issues for the Adolescent Athlete and the Team Physician: A Consensus Statement", written to improve the care of the adolescent athlete by understanding the medical, musculoskeletal, and psychological factors common in this age group. Several AMSSM members served as expert panelists to develop a consensus statement at the 3rd International Conference on Concussion in Sport in Zurich in November 2008. And AMSSM is one of 6 medical specialty groups which collaborated on the Preparticipation Physical Evaluation monograph, with the 4th Edition due out in early 2010.

Injury prevention starts with the 3 "Es": Education, Environmental changes, and Enforcement. We should develop guidelines for parents, coaches, and athletes, and provide opportunities for education on injury prevention and reduction, and early recognition of injuries and illnesses. We need to ensure high quality coaching and adult leadership, and timely access to qualified medical care for our youth. We must evaluate and ensure proper playing conditions and safe and appropriate equipment. And lastly, we need to support enforcement and legislative change, to make certain that these above changes can take place.

AMSSM has been and remains firmly committed to youth sports safety, and we welcome the opportunity to contribute to this important summit on Tuesday, January 12 at the State Capitol in Sacramento, California.

Sincerely,

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