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A National Survey of Parents' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Self-Reported Behaviors Concerning Sports Safety

Conducted for Safe Kids USA and Johnson & Johnson (Founding Sponsor of Safe Kids USA)



Methodology

From March 14 to 18, 2011, on behalf of Safe Kids USA, Hart Research Associates conducted an in-depth telephone survey among a representative nationwide cross section of parents who have at least one child age five to 14 years old who plays at least one of the following sports: baseball, basketball, field hockey, football, gymnastics, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, or t-ball. This survey served as an update to a similar study that Hart Research completed for Safe Kids USA in 2000; many of the same questions were asked to see if and how things have changed when it comes to children's sports safety. In all, 751 interviews were completed. The overall margin of error for the full sample is ± 3.7 percentage points, and is higher for subgroups of the sample.

In each household, the respondent was asked to answer most of the survey questions as they apply to a specific child. Among parents with more than one child, a random selection process was used to identify which child would be the focus of the survey. This report presents the study's key findings.

Introduction

This study provides an insightful look at American children's participation in organized sports from the perspective of the parents who guide, direct, and monitor this involvement. While the quintessential image of young children playing in their local Little League remains a vibrant reality, the landscape of youth sports has changed dramatically for the most recent generation of children who now choose from both an increasingly wider range of newer sports as well as among many tiers or levels of participation from traditional "rec" or recreational leagues to extremely competitive "travel" programs.

While issues related to the safety of kids' participation in sports receives sporadic news coverage and attention, parents in this study openly acknowledge that they do not have the information they need to help protect their children from injury while participating in team sports. Indeed, one of the most dramatic findings from this survey is the consistent and sizable gap between parents' perceived importance of knowing

the signs and symptoms of a range of common conditions and sports injuries and their self-reported confidence in their ability to do just that.

While parents credit organized sports for having many positive impacts on their children—from staying fit to learning the value of teamwork to simply having fun—they readily admit they lack confidence in their knowledge of vital, basic information about safety and also express a real interest in and appetite for forums that would provide them (along with their children and children's coaches) with this information.

This most recent survey is a follow-up to an earlier study done in 2000 among a similar audience of parents. Notably, the current study updates important trends and benchmark findings related to sports participation and sports safety, but it also explores new, timely, and emerging topics, such as overuse or "stress" injuries as well as concussions and dehydration.

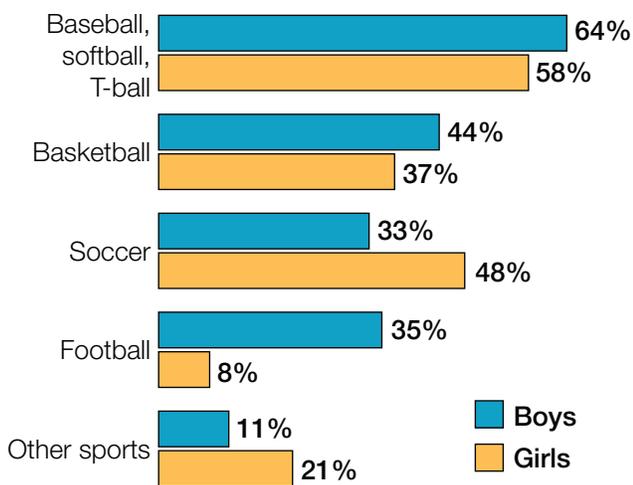
Key Findings

Parents whose children are involved in team sports view the experience as an important part of their children's lives and nearly all parents characterize their child's involvement in team sports as positive. Nine in 10 (98%) parents believe that their child's involvement in organized team sports is very or fairly important and virtually all (99%) parents surveyed believe that organized team sports provide positive experiences for their children, with 74% characterizing the experience as very positive. Parents believe that team sports provide their children with a number of benefits—in particular, three in 10 (31%) parents identify learning important values such as teamwork and sportsmanship as the most important benefit, 12% identify exercising and staying fit (which is a doubling from the figure in 2000 of 6%), 9% identify both having fun and interacting with other children as the most important benefit, and 4% say learning to compete is the top benefit. One-third (34%) volunteers that these benefits are all equally important.

For some children there is a real level of intensity around organized sports competition. Children involved in team sports spend an average of 7.4 hours a week practicing or playing in games. Boys

(average 8 hours) spend more time playing team sports than girls (average 6.4 hours), and 10- to 14-year-olds (average 8.9 hours) spend more time playing team sports than five- to nine-year-olds (average 5.5 hours). Indeed, team sports remain a serious and intense commitment for many young people. Today, about half (49%) of the parents surveyed report that their child participates in two or more team sports, compared with 40% in 2000. Additionally, 28% of children who participate in team sports play multiple sports in a single season. One in five (21%) plays on a select traveling team, and roughly the same proportion (19%) play the same sport on more than one team during a single season. As in the past, the most popular team sports are baseball, softball or t-ball, basketball, and soccer.

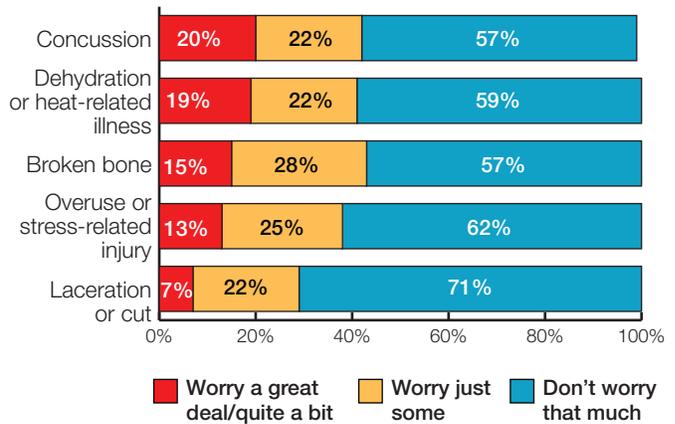
Participation in Sports by Gender



Parents generally express little concern about a number of potential injuries their children could experience while participating in team sports. Injuries that are more likely to be cause for concern among parents include concussions (20% worry a great deal or quite a bit) and dehydration or heat-related illness (19% worry a great deal or quite a bit). However, large majorities of parents do not worry much about any of the injuries or conditions asked about in the survey.

Parents' Concern About Specific Injuries Is Low

How much do you worry about your child suffering the following types of injuries when playing team sports?



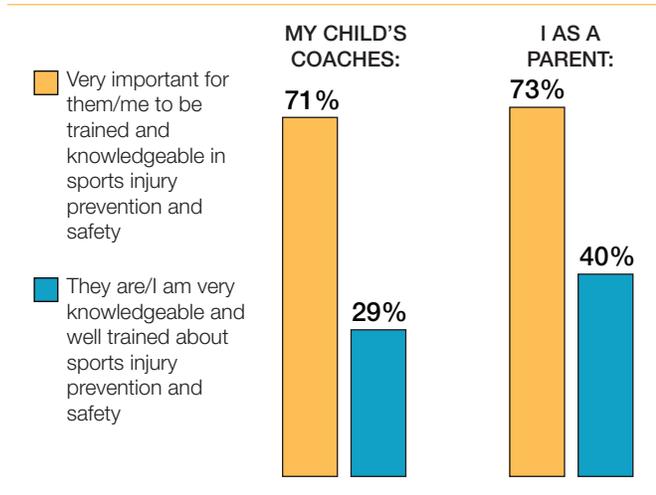
Parents who express concern about concussions and dehydration or heat-related illness at higher rates include parents of children who spend five hours a week or more playing team sports (29%), parents under age 35 (26%), and racial and ethnic minority parents (34%). In fact, minority parents worry a great deal or quite a bit about these kinds of injuries at more than double the rates of white parents. By far, 67% of parents believe that football poses the greatest threat of injury to their children. Roughly one in 10 parents identifies hockey, 6% identify soccer, and 5% identify baseball or softball as the team sport that poses the greatest threat of injury.

There is a wide and troubling gap between parents' belief in the importance of preventing sports injuries in their children and their confidence that coaches—and they as parents—have the knowledge, training, and ability to prevent such injuries. Parents are adamant that it is highly important that coaches and parents themselves be knowledgeable (and, in the case of coaches, trained) in sports injury prevention and sports safety. This is a virtually unanimous sentiment—96% say it is important for coaches (including 71% who say it is very important) and 99% say it is important for parents (including 73% who say it is very important). Large majorities of parents across the board believe this is important, though numbers are higher among mothers than fathers (78% and 62%, respectively, say it is very important for coaches) and among parents of 10- to 14-year-olds than among

parents of five to nine-year-olds (77% and 64%, respectively, for coaches).

And yet parents are far less likely to feel that they and coaches actually have solid knowledge and the training to prevent sports injuries—just 29% say coaches are very knowledgeable and trained, and just 40% say parents are very knowledgeable and trained.

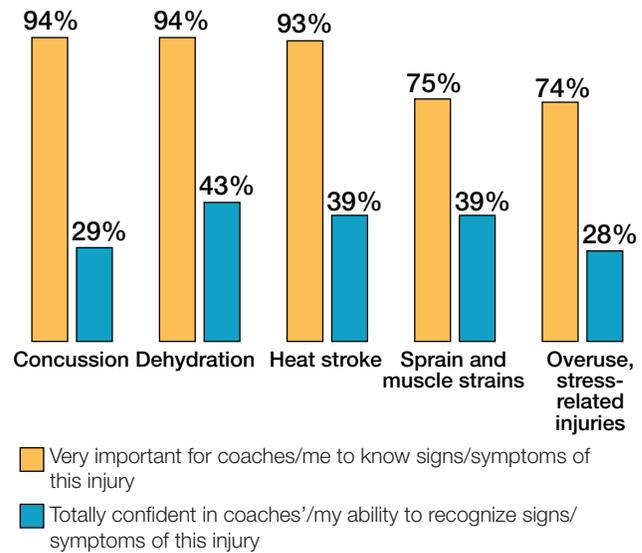
The Knowledge Gap



Interestingly, parents whose children play multiple sports are less confident about coaches' level of training (24% very knowledgeable/well trained) than parents whose kids play only one sport (34%). In assessing their own level of knowledge, fathers (44%), parents of football players (45%), and those whose children have been injured multiple times (48%) are more likely than their cohorts to say they are very knowledgeable.

This large knowledge gap also is clearly evident when it comes to specific types of injuries and conditions. Parents overwhelmingly say it is very important that they and coaches know the signs and symptoms of each of the types of injuries in the graph below; yet, in each case, far fewer say they are confident in their own ability and their child's coaches' ability to actually recognize the symptoms of these injuries.

The Knowledge Gap Extends to Specific Types of Injuries



Still, parents appear to know somewhat more about sports injuries than they did a decade ago:

- Parents are significantly more likely to recognize that the notion that more injuries occur among children during games than in practice is a fallacy (61% today versus 51% in 2000);
- Today parents are only slightly more likely to know that half of all sports injuries that children receive are preventable (77% versus 73%); and
- Parents are somewhat more likely to know that children are at a greater risk for sports injuries than are adults (46% versus 39%).

Additionally, four in five parents know that children need to drink fluids every 20 minutes when engaged in physical activity to avoid dehydration, and even more realize that a concussion can occur without the person losing consciousness (86%).

But even as these numbers are somewhat improved from 2000, clearly there is still significant work to do in educating parents. Three in five parents (61%) might know that sports practice is as potentially dangerous as actual games, but still one in three (32%) does not know this—and this proportion increases among non-Caucasian parents (43%) and fathers of boys (38%). Nearly half of parents know that children are at greater risk for injury than adults, but this means that

nearly half are unaware that this is the case. And one out of every six parents does not believe it is necessary for young athletes to drink fluids every 20 minutes in order to avoid dehydration. In other words, while parents appear to be more knowledgeable in some areas than they were a decade ago, they still have much to learn in order to maximize children’s safety on the sports field.

Moreover, among parents whose children have been injured while playing a team sport, which comprises one-third of parents overall (there is more detailed information about this group later in the report), only 13% believe the injury could have been prevented through better supervision, conditioning, training, or safety equipment.

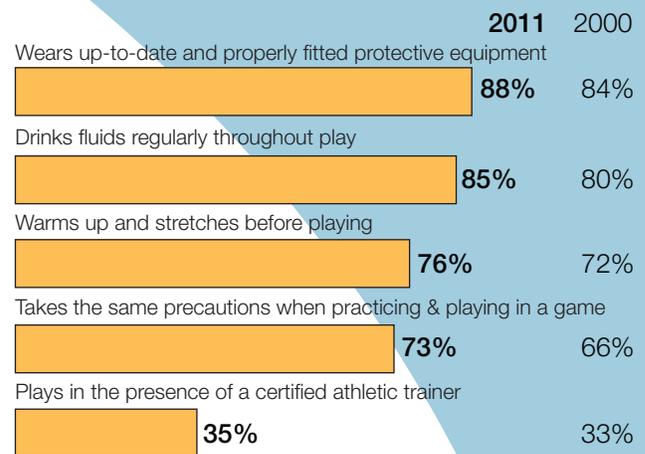
Parents still say injuries are “just part of the game,” underscoring the need for more education. Eighty-six percent (86%) of parents say that their child’s injury was “just part of the game” and probably would have happened anyway. This finding is modestly worse than in 2000, when 17% believed the injury could have been prevented. Fathers (9%) are even less likely than mothers (17%) to say the injury could have been prevented.

These findings, coupled with parents’ self-acknowledged dearth of knowledge on this issue, point to an important void that organizations such as Safe Kids USA can step in to correct the misinformation and fill in the gaps where basic information is lacking.

Children, their coaches, and parents are more likely to take a number of precautions to minimize the risk of injury than they were a decade ago. Overwhelming majorities of parents report that their young athletes do the following every time or almost every time they play or practice: wear properly fitted equipment (88%), drink fluids regularly (85%), warm up before playing (76%), and take the same precautions when practicing as when playing in a game (73%). However, only one in three children in this age range (5 to 14) that participates in team sports plays in the presence of a certified trainer. The more time a young athlete spends playing team sports, the more likely they are to engage in all these precautions.

Children Who Consistently Follow Selected Safety Procedures

My child consistently does this* in both practice and games:



* Ratings of 4 + 5 on a five-point scale, 5 = very consistent, does all the time

Similarly, parents report that they and their children’s coaches are taking certain precautions at high rates. Virtually all parents report sending their children to games and practices with water or sports drinks (97%), and regularly talk to their child to make sure they are feeling physically healthy (95%). More than four in five (84%) parents report that their child’s coach has mandatory water breaks during games and practices and seven in 10 or more report that their child has a pre-season checkup with a physician (76%), that their child does pre-season conditioning and exercise to get in shape before the season begins (72%), and that they keep their child’s coach informed about other sports and athletic activities (70%).

At the same time, parents and coaches could improve upon some precautionary measures. For example, only 57% of parents report that their child’s coach or trainer has a current copy of their child’s medical history. The same proportion report that their child’s coach is trained in CPR and keeps a first-aid kit on hand, but one in five (21%) does not know whether their child’s coach takes these important precautions.

Moreover, only a small majority (56%) of parents report that their child takes at least 10 weeks off from each sport they participate in to rest their bodies, and this is even somewhat less likely among kids who have been injured multiple times (49%). Indeed, lack of knowledge

and appropriate concern about overuse injuries is prevalent throughout the survey. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of parents do not keep their child's coaches informed about other athletic activities the child engages in during the season, and only 13% of parents worry about overuse and stress injuries. As noted earlier, one in five parents (19%) reports their child plays the same sport for multiple teams in the same season, and these parents are only slightly more worried (23%) about overuse injuries than parents overall.

Parents and Coaches Taking Precautions in Many Areas

- 97%** I send my child to practice and games with a water bottle or sports drink

- 95%** I talk to my child regularly to ensure that (he/she) is feeling physically healthy during (his/her) sports season

- 84%** My child's coach has mandatory water breaks in place for the kids so that they are drinking during practices and games

- 76%** My child has a checkup with a doctor before the sport's season starts to ensure that (he/she) does not have any health conditions that would prevent (him/her) from playing

- 72%** My child did preseason conditioning and exercised to get in shape BEFORE the season began

- 70%** I keep my child's coach informed of other sports and athletic activities that my child is engaged in during the season

- 57%** My child's coach is certified in CPR and keeps a first-aid kit on hand during play

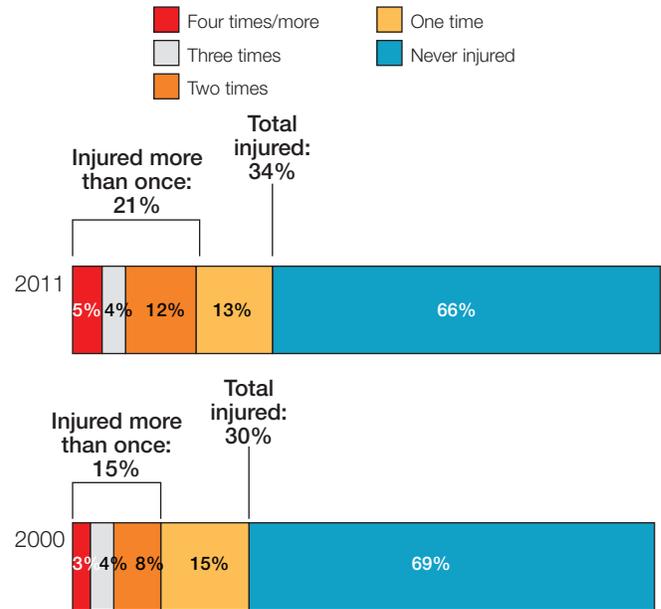
- 57%** My child's coach or certified athletic trainer has an up-to-date copy of my child's medical history

- 56%** Even if my child plays multiple sports, (he/she) takes at least 10 weeks off from each specific sport during the year in order to rest

Despite the increase in many precautions taken by young athletes, their parents, and coaches, children still are being injured at about the same rate as they were in 2000—though the rates of multiple injuries have increased significantly. While the proportion of young athletes who have been injured participating in team sports has increased slightly in the past 11 years from 31% in 2000 to 34% today, the number of young athletes who have sustained multiple injuries while playing

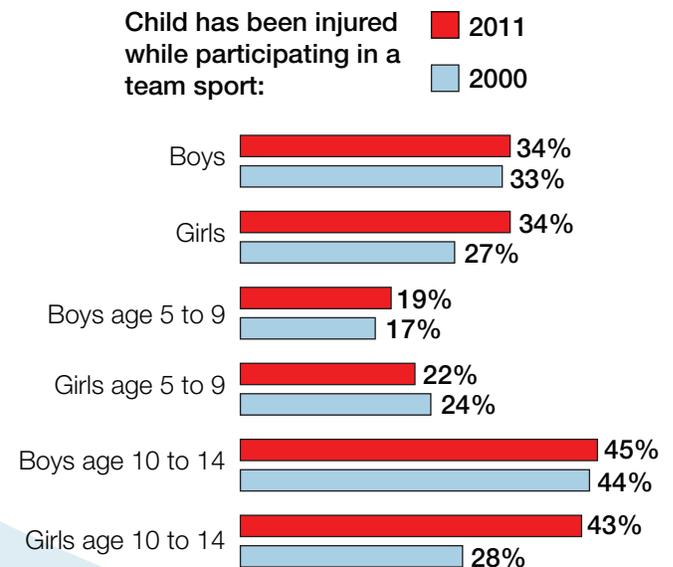
team sports has increased by nearly one and a half times, jumping from 15% in 2000 to 21% today.

Increased Rate of Multiple Injuries



This overall rate increase in injuries is due nearly entirely to higher rates of injuries among 10- to 14-year-old girls. Today, girls in this age group are getting injured on the playing field at an equal rate as boys in the same age range.

Increased Injury Rate Largely Among Girls Age 10 to 14



Rates of injury also have increased among children in non-Caucasian populations — in 2000 23% of minority parents said their children had been injured, while 35% say so today. Rates of injury among Caucasian children are unchanged during the same period and stand at 34%, meaning that Caucasian and non-Caucasian children are now being injured at roughly the same rate.

The most prevalent injuries continue to be sprains, strains, or pulled muscles, followed closely by bruises, black-and-blue marks, or internal bleeding. While the proportion of all children who participate in team sports that recently have experienced a sprain, strain, or pulled muscle is down from 2000, these are more common forms of injury for young athletes who spend five or more hours playing team sports (40% experienced), those who play on a school or traveling team (40%), play two or more sports (38%), as well as young athletes who participate in certain sports, namely basketball (44%) and football (40%).

Child's Most Frequent Injury

	March 2011 %	January 2000 %
Sprain, strain, pulled muscle	34	40
Bruise, black-and-blue marks, internal bleeding	33	25
Broken, fractured, or dislocated bone	13	13
Laceration, cut, puncture wound	7	7
Concussion or head injury	6	5
Dehydration	1	NA

Parents actively seek information on preventing children's sports injuries from a number of different sources, but there still is a great deal of interest in attending clinics on this topic.

The following table depicts the most frequently identified sources of information that parents turn to for information about keeping their child safe while participating in team sports.

Sources Parents Turn To

	%
Your child's doctor	39
Your child's coach	35
Sports or child safety Internet Web sites	28
Newspapers, magazines, or other publications	24
A certified athletic trainer	17
Parents of your child's teammates	16
Your child	13
A sports equipment store	8

Two in five (39%) parents report that they use two or more of the sources listed above, but parents' primary source of information depends on how much they feel they personally know about this issue. Parents who say they are "very" knowledgeable are more likely than average to turn to their child's doctor (44%) and less likely to turn to their child's coach (30%); parents who say they are "fairly" knowledgeable use their child's doctor (38%) and coach (37%) in equal measure; and those who rate themselves as not knowledgeable on this issue rely somewhat more heavily on coaches (38%) and far less on doctors (27%). At 28%, sports and child safety Web sites are in the middle of the pack in terms of popularity, but are used somewhat more heavily by fathers of boy athletes (34%), parents of football players (34%), and parents whose child has been injured multiple times (34%). In the case of fathers of boy athletes and parents of football players, Web sites are more heavily used than the child's coach.

Still, as previously noted, parents have low levels of confidence in their own ability and coaches' ability to prevent sports injuries, despite accessing a range of sources of information on this topic. Thus it is unsurprising that there is an extraordinary amount of interest in free youth sports safety clinics. Fully 96% of parents say it would be valuable for coaches to attend such clinics, 87% say it would be valuable for parents, and 79% say it would be valuable for kids. Indeed, this idea is so popular, that parents who already consider themselves very knowledgeable on this topic are as enthusiastic about these clinics as parents who rate their own level of personal knowledge as very low.

Conclusion

The findings from this study provide valuable feedback about how parents view their children's participation in organized sports and specifically how they approach efforts to keep their children safe and protect them from injury. As the landscape of youth sports in America has changed, so has the nature of the risks and injuries children experience. Indeed, while parents, coaches, and children appear to be taking more precautions, the rates of injuries among young athletes has risen. The fact that children are playing sports more intensely and on a higher level than ever before heightens the risk for injury, yet parents' concern has not risen accordingly. These trends likely will continue, and, unless parents and coaches take steps to educate themselves more fully on specific injuries and take additional steps to prevent them, the number of children who receive multiple injuries over the course of their athletic "careers" likely will increase as well. Parents clearly are focused on the topic of sports safety, and are aware that they, as well as their children's coaches, do not know as much as they should about injury prevention. They identify this as an important subject for both themselves and coaches, yet parents' inconsistent grasp of basic safety-related information — coupled with their enthusiasm for forums that would provide them with this guidance — stands out as an important need to be addressed. A national campaign on sports safety issues, such as that proposed by Safe Kids USA, can be an important step in helping to close parents' "knowledge gap" and helping to ensure that children and youth have safer experiences on the court and field.

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