

Lifewire: Study looks at soccer-related injuries

by Ven Griva

It's news that might make soccer moms sit up and take notice.

Young soccer players made 1.6 million emergency room visits between 1990 and 2003, according to a review published Feb. 1 in the *American Journal of Sports Medicine*.

Researchers from the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Columbus Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, reviewed pediatric, soccer-related data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's National Electronic Injury Surveillance System. The NEISS collects information - such as patient age, injury type and injury event - from 100 U.S. hospital emergency rooms.

The researchers reviewed 1.6 million soccer-related injuries to children ages 2 to 18 that were seen in emergency rooms participating in the NEISS between 1990 and 2003.

Study co-authors Robert E. Leininger, Christy L. Knox and R. Dawn Comstock found remarkable differences in age, sex, injury rate, diagnosis and disposition of injuries, the report said. Girl soccer players might be sustaining more injuries than boys, but boys are twice as likely to be hospitalized for their injuries.

"Future research is needed to further examine soccer-related injuries by gender," the authors write. "Society norms in the U.S., which may allow very young boys to be more physically active and to engage in activities such as soccer with less parental supervision whereas very young girls may be less likely to do so, may explain the gender difference."

It was the first study to investigate soccer-related injuries among the entire U.S. pediatric population, says the journal article.

Researchers found a significant increase in injuries to female soccer players. They suspect the increase corresponds with the sharp increase in the number of girls playing soccer during the 14-year span of the study.

Overall, girls were treated for more ankle and knee injuries and were more likely to have more strains and sprains than were boys.

The study divided young soccer players into four age groups: 2-4 years of age, 5-9 years, 10-14 and 15-18. They found that players in the 10-14 age group (49 percent of all injuries) were four times as likely to be injured as those in the 5-9 group (12 percent).

"It is possible the middle-school-aged player is bigger, stronger and playing harder, leading to an increase in the likelihood of injury," said Knox.

The youngest players, especially boys, were more likely to be hospitalized, the study found.

"In general, younger children have great difficulty expressing themselves in words," Knox said. "When that child is injured, it seems prudent to hospitalize and observe that child."

The study also found:

- Injuries to the face, head and neck were more common in very young soccer players.

- Arm and shoulder injuries were most common in players in the 5-9 age group.

- Concussion was the most common injury for players in the 15-18 group.

- The number of strains, sprains and leg injuries increased with age.

The study authors wrote that injury is part of athletics, and that soccer produces fewer injuries per capita than do other contact sports.

To put that in perspective, the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission tracked injuries leading to emergency room visits for other sports in 2005. The CPSC ranked basketball No. 1, with 409,799 visits, football No. 2 with 376,115 and bicycling No. 3 with 317,040, said Patti Davis of the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine.

"You want to know what the deadliest activity is?" asked Davis. "Deadliest is riding an (all-terrain vehicle) - 740 deaths in 2005, one third to children under 16."

Now that's something to make you sit up and take notice.

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