

# Children's Sports Eye Safety Position Statement



## Position Statement

Many children and adolescents participate in athletics. Some sports present a heightened risk for serious eye injury and blindness. To reduce the occurrence of sports-related eye injuries and blindness, Prevent Blindness strongly supports efforts to ensure that children involved in athletics utilize appropriate safety eyewear for every sport in which they participate.

### To this end, we recommend that:

- School and youth athletic league programs along with state-based programs must educate children, coaches, and parents about the importance of wearing appropriate sports eye protection.
- Appropriate protective eyewear for sports should be chosen only after consultation with an eye doctor, physician, or athletic trainer and must be appropriate for the particular sport and the child's size.
- Children and adolescents should only wear sports eye protectors that meet the standards set forth by American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) and American National Standards Institute (ANSI).
- State legislators should adopt legislation requiring the use of protective eyewear among children of any age when participating in medium to high-risk sports (as listed in the American Academy of Pediatrics Protective Eyewear for Young Athletes policy<sup>1</sup>) through school, youth league and collegiate athletic programs. Protective eyewear should be mandatory for all athletes who are functionally monocular (one-eyed).
- Sports eyewear that does not conform to the standards outlined by ASTM and ANSI should be banned by school, community and collegiate sport programs.
- Appropriate sports eyewear should be made available through funding similar to other equipment such as helmets, uniforms and pads to children who participate in school and community sports programs for children who cannot afford them.

Athletes with an eye injury should be examined by an eye care provider to determine when the athlete should return to the sport.

### Discussion:

Acute eye injuries can occur when athletes fail to wear eye protection or when athletes use goggles, glasses or face shields that are poorly-fitted or inappropriate for a particular sport. Some common injuries among athletes who do not wear approved protection include corneal abrasions, ocular inflammation, orbital fractures, swollen or detached retinas, traumatic cataract, and hyphema.

Glass and plastic lenses, open eye guards (those without lenses), and typical sunglasses designed for daily use will not adequately protect a child's eyes during sports. Lenses crafted from non-polycarbonate materials can shatter upon impact, increasing the severity of an eye injury and putting a child at risk for blindness.



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# Children's Sports Eye Safety Position Statement—Continued

Sports safety eyewear must meet the standards set forth by the ASTM and ANSI. While many sports played without protective eyewear pose a threat to children's vision, eye injuries are most prevalent in basketball, water sports, gun-related activities, and baseball. Currently, the majority of children's athletic leagues and teams do not require children to wear sports eye protection.

## Statistics

- 72 percent of sports related eye injuries occur in people younger than 25 years of age.<sup>ii</sup>
- Only 16.5 percent of children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years used personal protective eyewear in recreational activities and hazardous situations around the home in 2008.<sup>iii</sup>
- Using the right kind of eye protection while playing sports can help prevent serious eye injuries and even blindness. Ninety percent of eye injuries are preventable.<sup>iv</sup>
- In 2013, there were more than 13,000 eye injuries sustained by children ages 14 years and younger. Basketball is the leading cause of eye injuries, followed by water/pool activities and use of guns (air, gas, spring, BB).<sup>v</sup>
- According to the National Eye Institute, sports-related eye injuries cost \$175-200 million every year.<sup>vi</sup>

## Current Children's Sports Eye Safety Efforts

Objective V-6 of Healthy People 2020, established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, calls for efforts to increase the use of appropriate safety eyewear in recreational activities.

The national governing board for women's lacrosse requires any athlete who participates in this sport at the youth, scholastic and collegiate level to wear protective eyewear to minimize the risk of catastrophic eye injury.<sup>vii</sup>

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), the American Optometric Association (AOA), the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus, and the American Public Health Association recommend protective eyewear for children participating in sports that pose risks for eye injury.

## Approval:

This statement was approved by the Prevent Blindness Board of Directors on November 8, 2014.

## Review Date:

The Children's Sport Eye Safety position statement will be reviewed again in November 2016.

## References

<sup>i</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. Protective Eyewear for Young Athletes. Accessed at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/113/3/619.full>. Accessed on November 7, 2014.

<sup>ii</sup> United States Consumer Product Safety Commission. Sports and Recreational Eye Injuries. Washington, DC: US Consumer Product Safety Commission, 2000.

<sup>iii</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2020. Accessed at <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/objectiveslist.aspx?topicId=42>. Accessed on January 16, 2014.

<sup>iv</sup> Harrison, A., & Telander, D.G. (2002). Eye Injuries in the youth athlete: a case-based approach. *Sports Medicine*, 31(1), 33-40.

<sup>v</sup> United States Consumer Product Safety Commission, Directorate of Epidemiology; National Injury Information Clearinghouse; National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS). Product Summary Report – Eye Injuries Only – Calendar Year 2012.

<sup>vi</sup> Napier, S.M., Baker, R.S., Sanford, D.G., & Easterbrook, M. Eye injuries in athletics and recreation. *Survey of Ophthalmology*, 41(3), 229-244, 1996.

<sup>vii</sup> Klossner, D., Eye Safety in Sports. In *NCAA: Sports Medicine Handbook*. 21st ed. Indianapolis, IN: NCAA, 2002, 96-98.