YOUTH ICE HOCKEY

WHAT PARENTS AND YOUNG ATHLETES NEED TO KNOW

SCOTTISH RITE FOR CHILDREN SPORTS MEDICINE

Ice hockey has become a popular team sport for many young athletes. With increased participation, hockey-related injuries in youth athletes have also risen. It is important to learn about common youth hockey injuries, how to prevent them and when to seek treatment.

UNDERSTANDING COMMON INJURIES IN YOUTH HOCKEY

Concussions

A blow to the head from a fall on the ice, a body check, a stick or even a puck can cause a concussion in youth hockey. Concussions can also occur from a fall or a collision that does not impact the head directly. Hockey leagues that allow open-ice body checking have a higher number of concussions among players.

If an athlete experiences a collision or injury to the head, neck or body with any concussion symptoms, **they must immediately be removed from playing.** The athlete should not return to play the same day, even if there was no loss of consciousness. A medical professional with experience managing concussions should determine when the athlete is safe to return to play.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A CONCUSSION:

- Headache
- Memory or concentration problems
- Nausea
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Confusion or "feeling in a fog"
- Feeling tired or sleep problems
- Dizziness or balance problems
- Double or blurred vision
- Emotional/behavioral changes

Shoulder Injuries

The shoulder is a very mobile joint, and it is at risk of injury even with top-of-the-line padding and equipment. Injuries to the collarbone (clavicle) and shoulder, such as fractures, dislocations and separations, can occur from any collision or fall. If there is an obvious change in the appearance of the shoulder, pain, swelling or limited motion, an evaluation is necessary.

Hip Injuries

Hip injuries are the most common type of injury in hockey. The repetitive nature of skating puts stress on the muscles and bones around the hip, leading to growth plate injuries and muscle strains. Without sufficient rest or cross-training, the bones in the hip joint can become abnormally shaped. This change is common in ice hockey players, especially goalies, and may lead to a condition called femoroacetabular impingement — a pinching of soft tissues in the ball-and-socket hip joint. A medical provider should evaluate players who experience persistent hip pain while skating.

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The Center for Excellence in Sports Medicine at Scottish Rite for Children is a comprehensive practice specializing in the treatment of sport-related injuries and conditions in young and growing athletes. Our strength and conditioning coaches lead group training sessions designed to teach proper movement patterns and build strength, speed and agility, which can reduce the risk of many common injuries.

Learn more about our Athlete Development program.

Keep up with our Sports Medicine Program.

Scottish Rite for Children Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Center
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Soft Tissues Injuries

Playing ice hockey comes with a major risk of soft tissue lacerations (cuts) or contusions (bruises) from slashes, skates, blocked shots, open-ice collisions and falls. These minor injuries often heal with early treatments, such as ice, compression and brief periods of rest. A medical provider should evaluate severe injuries that take a long time to improve. This kind of injury may have serious long-term effects.

REDUCING INJURY RISK IN YOUTH HOCKEY

Equipment

Hockey equipment plays a key role in preventing and reducing the severity of injuries during games and practices. Protective gear that meets standards and fits correctly will provide the most protection. To reduce the risk of preventable injuries in the growing athlete, yearly equipment fittings are recommended.

Off-Ice Warm-up

A dynamic warm-up involves continuous movement to raise the body's core temperature before training or competition. This includes dynamic lower body stretches, sprinting and explosive movements to improve performance and prepare the body for practice or games.

Sport Specialization, Rest and Cross-Training

Early sport specialization increases an athlete's risk of injury and affects their athletic development. Focusing on a single sport at an early age may lead to movement imbalances, an increased risk of injury and overtraining. A break of 1 or 2 months between seasons and 1 to 2 days off each week during hockey season is recommended. A well-rounded strength and conditioning program including off-ice training can improve performance and reduce the risk of injury.