

## IMPROVED HOCKEY SAFETY, PREVENTS INJURIES

As a hockey parent myself, I know what it's like to see my child suffer injuries on the ice. But by following a few simple safety precautions, we can all keep our children safer and enjoying the sport they love.

Youth hockey is one of the fastest growing sports in the greater Columbus area, which now boasts many formal high school teams and a successful Club league, the Greater Columbus High School Club Hockey League. I've watched this growth as my son has participated in hockey over the last eight years.

The reality is that injury rates for ice hockey at the youth level are relatively low, particularly compared to American football at the same ages. Most injuries in younger children involve the upper extremity (shoulders, neck and head), and rarely lead to hospitalization. The risk of injury goes up when the players begin checking. There does not seem to be any protective effect in having the players learn how to check at a younger age — this actually doubles the injury rate. As players get bigger, faster and more skilled, their injury rates rise.

Players and parents do not always have a clear and accurate idea of the risks, and what can be done to stay protected. One study found that many players at the youth level felt that by simply wearing a helmet, they would have no risk of head or neck injury. This misinformation can be corrected through education on the facts of injury.

Some injuries can be caused by foul play, for instance checking from behind. United States of America Hockey (USAH) has changed the rules this season to further penalize this and other infractions in an attempt to minimize serious injury. Studies have shown that by appropriate enforcement of the rules by referees, education of coaches and preventive programs aimed at players and their parents, injury rates can decrease. Other ways to lower injury rates are to play on larger sheets of ice and play four on four.

These are some of the ongoing strategies to make ice hockey as safe as possible. I encourage you to ask your coaches about the educational programs that are available to your child's team to make everyone aware of common injuries and how best to prevent them.



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