

# Press Release

## Young School Athletes at Risk for Sports-Related Injuries, including Heat Stroke

### Four Teen Athletes Died in Past 7 Days During Football Practice Due to Extreme Heat

August 4, 2011

**Charleston, SC--** With many young school athletes working hard this month to prepare for fall sports, Safe Kids USA is hosting [Youth Sports Safety Clinics](#) across the country to educate parents and coaches on how to keep children safe and prevent sports injuries, including heat-related illnesses. Nearly 3/4 of U.S. households have at least one child who plays organized sports. Unfortunately, about 3.5 million children receive medical treatment for a sports-related injury each year, and as many as half of these injuries are preventable according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“With scorching high temperatures and vigorous practice sessions underway for school age children, parents and coaches have an even greater role to play in keeping children safe and injury free,” said Meri-K Appy, president of Safe Kids USA. “It’s vitally important to set realistic expectations for children about sports and understand how to help them prepare properly, prevent injuries and play safely.”

In a nation-wide education campaign supported by its founding sponsor Johnson & Johnson, Safe Kids USA coalitions have hosted more than 150 Youth Sports Safety Clinics for parents and youth coaches since April. The Safe Kids Trident Area coalition is holding its second Youth Sports Safety Seminar this year at the Joe Riley Park on Sunday, August 7. The Seminar will be attended by the area’s middle and high school football, soccer and tennis coaches; athletes, and parents before the ball game.

At the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), 164 children, ages 17 and under, have been treated for sports related injuries since 2006, and 25 percent were for heat exhaustion. According to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, the number of heat-related injuries from 1997 to 2006 increased 133 percent. Youth accounted for the largest proportion of heat-related injuries or 47.6 percent.

“In the past seven days there has been 4 teen athletes, including 1 teen from South Carolina, that have died due to the extreme heat while practicing high school football,” said Douglas J. Casa, PhD, ATC, FACSM, FNATA, and chief

operating officer with the Korey Stringer Institute, Neag School of Education, for the University of Connecticut. "Over the past five years, the number of heat stroke deaths from exertion in youth sports is higher than in any five-year period in the past 35 years. A coach needs to have the knowledge to prevent the condition, recognize the signs or symptoms, and then rely on athletic trainers or emergency response personnel to implement the life-saving treatment strategy."

[A national survey commissioned by Safe Kids USA and Johnson & Johnson](#) confirmed parents and coaches need more youth sports safety information. In fact, just 29 percent of parents surveyed feel coaches have the necessary skills to identify and prevent injuries and just 40 percent feel confident in their own abilities.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the rate and severity of sports related injuries increases with a child's age. Children ages 5 - 14 years of age account for nearly 40 percent of all sports-related injuries treated in hospital emergency departments with collision and contact sports associated with higher rates of injury. In fact, the CPSC reported in 2009 an estimated 216,232 children age 14 and under were injured playing football, 88,789 were injured in soccer. For children 14 years and younger playing baseball or softball, there were 115,133 injuries in 2009.

The most common types of sport-related injuries in children are sprains, muscle strains, bone or growth plate injuries, and heat-related illness. Although very rare, brain injury is the leading cause of sports-related death to children.

"One worrisome aspect about the injuries that occur in youth sports is that so many of them could be prevented," said Dr. C. David Geier, Jr., director of MUSC Sports medicine and assistant professor of orthopedic surgery. "We know that almost half of injuries in middle-school and high-school athletes are overuse injuries in sports. These aren't traumatic injuries over which the athletes and the parents and coaches have no control. These are overuse injuries that could be prevented with rest from the sport for two to three months, proper fitness and strength training necessary for that sport, and not trying to compete when experiencing pain."

Safe Kids Youth Sports Safety Clinics are focusing on the most common causes of preventable injuries including overuse injuries, heat-related illness, concussions and injuries caused by pre-existing medical conditions. Safe Kids encourages parents to have consistent communications with their child's coach in order to take a proactive role in keeping their child safe while playing sports.

### **Pre-Participation Physical Evaluations**

Safe Kids USA and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend every child receive an [annual pre-participation evaluation](#) (PPE), which will help determine his/her readiness to play sports and may uncover any underlying

conditions that could limit participation or increase the risk for injury or a medical emergency. Parents should talk to their child's doctor and ask them to perform the full pre-participation evaluation, which was recently updated by the AAP.

### **Dehydration/Health Related Illness**

Young athletes need to be encouraged to drink water before, during and after practice, in order to prevent dehydration and the risk of a more serious heat-related illness such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Athletes should start practice/play fully hydrated, and drink water for every 20 minutes of play.

### **Overuse Injuries**

An overuse injury is difficult to diagnose and treat because they are usually subtle and occur over time. Fatigue, burnout or playing while injured can lead to overuse injuries such as repetitive motion injuries as well as acute injuries including sprains (mostly ankle), muscle strains, bone or growth plate injuries. Warming up and stretching before play is essential to preventing sports related injuries. This helps athletes avoid injuries such as muscle tears or sprains by stretching and releasing any muscle tension.

### **Concussion**

Children who do not wear or use protective equipment are at greater risk of sustaining sports-related injuries. Parents can reduce their child's risk of minor or serious injuries such as concussions by making sure their child wears the appropriate and properly fitted sports equipment during practice and competitive play and knowing the signs and symptoms of a concussion.

### **About Safe Kids USA**

Safe Kids USA is a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, which is a global network of organizations whose mission is to prevent unintentional childhood injury, the leading cause of death and disability to children ages 1 to 14. More than 600 coalitions and chapters across the U.S. and more than 20 member countries across the globe bring together health and safety experts, educators, corporations, foundations, governments and volunteers to educate and protect families. Founded in 1987 as the National SAFE KIDS Campaign by Children's National Medical Center with support from Johnson & Johnson, Safe Kids Worldwide is a non-profit organization located in Washington, D.C.

### **About MUSC**

Founded in 1824 in Charleston, The Medical University of South Carolina is the oldest medical school in the South. Today, MUSC continues the tradition of excellence in education, research, and patient care. MUSC educates and trains more than 3,000 students and residents, and has nearly 11,000 employees, including approximately 1,500 faculty members. As the largest non-federal employer in Charleston, the university and its affiliates have collective annual budgets in excess of \$1.7 billion. MUSC operates a 750-bed medical center, which includes a nationally recognized Children's Hospital, the Ashley River

Tower (cardiovascular, digestive disease, and surgical oncology), and a leading Institute of Psychiatry. For more information on academic information or clinical services, visit [www.musc.edu](http://www.musc.edu). For more information on hospital patient services, visit [www.muschealth.com](http://www.muschealth.com).

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