

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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Florida named #1 nationally in school sports safety report

As students go back to school, Florida secondary school athletes are safer than ever before, according to a new study released by the Korey Stringer Institute (KSI) at the University of Connecticut. Florida has been named #1 nationally for its comprehensive health and safety policies for secondary school athletics in the 2021 *State High School Sports Safety Policy Evaluation* report.

According to KSI, the purpose of the study is to “provide a graded assessment of the implementation of health and safety policies related to the leading causes of sudden death and catastrophic injury in sport at the state level for secondary school athletics within the United States.” The review was based on information from high school associations and state legislation for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It focused on the four primary causes of sudden death in high school sports, which account for a majority of sport-related deaths: exertional heat stroke, sudden cardiac arrest, traumatic head injuries, and exertional sickling.

According to the study, Florida has the most comprehensive health and safety policies for secondary school athletics in the nation, with a score of 87.67%. New Jersey is second at 85%, and Massachusetts is third at 79.4%. California is at the bottom of the list with a ranking of 30.8%. Florida’s score increased 11.47% from its previous ranking of 76.20%, which is the largest increase for any state this year.

In part, Florida’s high score is a result of recent legislative changes, specifically in the area of exertional heatstroke. Last year, the Zachary Martin law went into effect, strengthening protocols to prevent heat-related illness in high school athletes. KSI gave Florida a perfect score (20 out of 20%) in the areas of heat acclimatization policies, the proper use of Wet Bulb Globe Thermometers (WBGT), and the presence of cold water immersion tubs at all schools for the onsite cooling of athletes suffering from a heat-related illness.

The law is named after 16-year-old Ft. Myers athlete Zach Martin, who succumbed to exertional heatstroke during a summer football practice in 2017. Zach’s mother, Laurie Martin Giordano, worked tirelessly after his death to lobby for new heat-related policies for secondary school athletics so that no other family had to face a similar preventable tragedy. She founded the Zach Martin Memorial Foundation to educate athletes, coaches, and parents about Exertional Heat Illnesses (www.zachmartinfoundation.com).

In the KSI report, Florida also received a 20/20% for its sudden cardiac arrest policies, 18/20% for its policies concerning traumatic head injuries, 15/20% for appropriate healthcare coverage, and 14.67/20% for emergency preparedness. The *Orthopedic Journal of Sports Medicine* will publish the study with these findings in the October issue. It has been released electronically ahead of print:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03635465211031849>

A link to the study can be found at <https://ksi.uconn.edu/high-school-state-policies-2-2-2/>.

For more information on KSI go to <https://ksi.uconn.edu>.