

NTYFL Safety Guidelines

Proper Equipment

Ensuring all players have and correctly use the right equipment is the first line of defense against injuries.

- **Helmets:** Every player must have a properly fitted helmet that meets the NOCSAE (National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment) standard. The helmet's fit should be checked at the beginning of the season and periodically throughout. It should not move or slide on the player's head when they shake it.
 - **Shoulder Pads:** Shoulder pads should be sized correctly to cover the shoulders and collarbones. They should fit snugly without restricting arm movement.
 - **Mouthguards:** Mouthguards are mandatory for all players during practices and games. They protect teeth, gums, and can help reduce the risk of concussion. They should be properly fitted, either store-bought boil-and-bite or custom-made.
 - **Protective Padding:** All players should wear padded pants with pads for the hips, thighs, and knees, as well as a protective cup.
 - **Cleats:** Players should wear appropriate cleats for the playing surface. Worn-out or ill-fitting cleats can lead to ankle and foot injuries.
-

Injury Prevention

Coaches and staff play a crucial role in preventing injuries through proper training techniques and player management.

- **Proper Technique:** Coaches must teach and reinforce correct tackling and blocking techniques that emphasize the use of the shoulder, not the head. The "heads up" tackling method, where the player keeps their head up and uses their shoulder to make contact, is essential.
- **Conditioning and Warm-ups:** All practices and games must begin with a proper warm-up, including stretching and light cardio, to prepare muscles and reduce the risk of strains and tears. A cool-down period with stretching should follow.
- **Player Hydration:** Coaches should schedule frequent water breaks, especially in hot weather, to prevent heat-related illnesses. Players should be encouraged to drink water before, during, and after practices and games.
- **Coach and Staff Training:** All coaches should be certified in first aid and CPR. They should also be knowledgeable about the signs and symptoms of common sports injuries, including concussions.

- **Rotation and Rest:** Coaches should rotate players to prevent overuse injuries and ensure adequate rest. Players should not be allowed to "play through" an injury.
-

Emergency Preparedness

Having a clear plan for medical emergencies is critical for the safety of all players.

- **Emergency Action Plan (EAP):** A written EAP should be created and shared with all coaches, staff, and parents. It should include the location of the nearest medical facility, emergency contact numbers, and instructions on how to respond to various medical emergencies.
- **First Aid Kit:** A well-stocked first aid kit should be present at all practices and games. It should include basic supplies like bandages, antiseptic wipes, instant cold packs, and tape.
- **Concussion Protocol:** A strict concussion protocol must be in place. If a player is suspected of having a concussion, they must be immediately removed from play and not allowed to return until they are cleared by a medical professional. Coaches and parents should be educated on the signs of a concussion (e.g., headache, dizziness, confusion).
- **Parent Communication:** Coaches should maintain a clear line of communication with parents, including collecting up-to-date emergency contact information and any relevant medical history for each player.

By consistently implementing these three components, a youth football program can significantly reduce the risk of injury and create a safe environment for all players.