

Assembly Bill No. 1

CHAPTER 158

An act to add Article 2.7 (commencing with Section 124240) to Chapter 4 of Part 2 of Division 106 of the Health and Safety Code, relating to youth athletics.

[Approved by Governor July 31, 2019. Filed with Secretary of State July 31, 2019.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1, Cooper. Youth athletics: California Youth Football Act.

Under existing law, a school district, charter school, or private school that elects to offer an athletic program is prohibited from allowing a high school or middle school football team to conduct more than 2 full-contact practices, as defined, per week during the preseason and regular season, as defined, and from conducting a full-contact practice during the off-season.

This bill would express legislative findings and declarations relating to youth football and specifically relating to player safety. The bill, on and after January 1, 2021, would require a youth sports organization, as defined, that conducts a tackle football program to comply with certain requirements, including, among other things, not conducting more than 2 full-contact practices, as defined, per week during the preseason and regular season; not holding a full-contact practice during the off-season; having coaches receive a tackling and blocking certification, as specified; having designated personnel annually complete specified concussion and head injury education, a specified factsheet related to opioids, and designated training relating to heat-related illness, as defined; meeting specified requirements relating to safety equipment; having a licensed medical professional present during games, as specified; having coaches receive first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and automated external defibrillator certification; and inspecting safety equipment, as specified.

The bill, on and after January 1, 2021, would require a youth tackle football league to establish youth tackle football participant divisions that are organized by relative age or weight or by both age and weight, and to retain information for the tracking of youth sports injuries, as specified. The bill would declare that nothing in its provisions would prohibit any youth sports organization or youth tackle football league from adopting and enforcing rules providing a higher level of safety than the requirements of this bill.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Youth football's highest priority is the safety and well-being of its participants. California children must have the right to be protected with safe youth football standards and practices empowering parents to make informed choices regarding the elected activities of their children.

(2) Nationwide, over 2.5 million players, coaches, cheerleaders, and parent volunteers participate in youth football.

(3) Youth football promotes the values of teamwork, self-discipline, diversity, academics, nutrition, leadership, and acceptance.

(4) Youth football promotes an active lifestyle that helps combat obesity rates in youth, which have increased by 300 percent over the past four decades and that lead to a broad range of health problems previously not seen until adulthood, such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and elevated blood cholesterol levels.

(5) Youth sports have become increasingly expensive due to the elimination of after school sports programs and the proliferation of travel teams and tournament-centric scheduling, but youth football remains an affordable neighborhood-based sport that is accessible in every community in California, irrespective of socioeconomic status or geographic location.

(6) Football is one of California's most popular sports, and the safety and well-being of the players is youth football's top priority.

(7) Many youth football organizations have implemented policies requiring the annual or biannual recertification of all football helmets by the helmet manufacturer or by an independent third party and the replacement of helmets that are damaged or that do not meet the current safety standards or recertification requirements.

(8) New helmet testing standards are being implemented to enable players to wear the safest helmet possible, and manufacturers continue to advance helmet technology.

(9) Blocking and tackling techniques designed to remove the head from contact have become the nationwide standard for teaching blocking and tackling, and coaches are required to complete annual certification and continuing education in blocking and tackling techniques that emphasize the removal of the head from any blocking or tackling and that provide coaches with noncontact drills designed to reinforce this training.

(10) The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Concussion Protocol Training has become standard for many youth football organizations and coaches in an attempt to minimize the risk of injury for youth football players, and the training is designed to identify those players who exhibit symptoms of a concussion, to prescribe protocols for the immediate removal of those players from the game or practice, and to outline stringent "return to play" protocols that coaches, players, and parents must follow after a youth football player has received clearance from a medical doctor before that player is allowed to return to full participation.

(11) Youth football organizations have implemented policies for concussion response, proper hydration, equipment fitting, and age and weight requirements.

(12) California prohibits high school and middle school football teams from conducting more than two full-contact practices per week during the preseason and regular season, and California also prohibits the full-contact portion of a practice from exceeding 90 minutes in any single day and completely prohibits full-contact practice during the off-season.

(13) The awareness of the possible injury risks associated with football are now widely known and accepted by parents, players, coaches, officials, medical professionals, and the general public.

(14) The decision to play youth football ultimately rests with the parents, after their thoughtful consideration of the risks and benefits, as to whether participation in youth football is in their child's best interest.

(15) In order to ensure youth tackle football participant safety and competitive play, youth tackle football leagues should be divided into divisions based on the participant's relative size and maturity, including classifications by appropriate weight, age, and size.

(b) It is therefore the intent of the Legislature to build upon prior legislation, including Assembly Bill 2007 (Chapter 516 of the Statutes of 2016), to improve youth tackle football safety with new safety standards while honoring youth tackle football's spirit and tradition.

SEC. 2. Article 2.7 (commencing with Section 124240) is added to Chapter 4 of Part 2 of Division 106 of the Health and Safety Code, to read:

Article 2.7. California Youth Football Act

124240. (a) This article shall be known, and may be cited, as the California Youth Football Act.

(b) As used in this article:

(1) "Coach" means a person appointed by a youth sports organization to supervise or instruct a participant in the sport of youth tackle football.

(2) "Full-contact portion" of practice is defined as the period of time in drills or live action that involves contact at game speed.

(3) "Full-contact practice" means a session where one or more drills or live action is conducted that involves contact at game speed, as in an actual tackle football game or scrimmage. This includes simulations or drills that involve any number of players.

(4) "Heat-related illness" includes, but is not necessarily limited to, heat cramps, heat syncope, heat exhaustion, and exertional heat stroke.

(5) "Off-season" means a period extending from the end of the regular season until 30 days before the commencement of the next regular season.

(6) "Play" includes participation in a youth tackle football game, scrimmage, or practice.

(7) "Preseason" means a period of 30 days before the commencement of the regular season.

(8) “Regular season” means the period from the first league football game or scrimmage until the completion of the final football game of that season.

(9) “Safety equipment” includes, but is not necessarily limited to, all of the following:

(A) A helmet and its associated parts, including, but not necessarily limited to, a face mask and mouthguard.

(B) Hip, knee, and shoulder pads.

(C) A jersey.

(D) A tailbone protector.

(E) Pants and thigh guards.

(F) Shoes, including cleats.

(10) “Youth sports organization” means an organization, business, or nonprofit entity that sponsors or conducts amateur sports competition, training, camps, clinics, practices, or clubs.

(11) “Youth tackle football league” means the organization that groups together youth sports organizations that conduct youth tackle football, administers rules, and sets game schedules. It may or may not be associated with a national organization.

124241. On and after January 1, 2021, a youth sports organization that conducts a tackle football program shall comply with all of the following requirements:

(a) A tackle football team shall not conduct more than two full-contact practices per week during the preseason and regular season.

(b) A tackle football team shall not hold a full-contact practice during the off-season.

(c) The full-contact portion of a practice shall not exceed 30 minutes in any single day.

(d) A coach shall annually receive a tackling and blocking certification from a nationally recognized program that emphasizes shoulder tackling, safe contact and blocking drills, and techniques designed to minimize the risk during contact by removing the involvement of youth tackle football participant’s head from all tackling and blocking techniques.

(e) Each youth tackle football administrator, coach, and referee shall annually complete all of the following:

(1) The concussion and head injury education pursuant to Section 124235.

(2) The Opioid Factsheet for Patients pursuant to Section 124236.

(3) Training in the basic understanding of the signs, symptoms, and appropriate responses to heat-related illness.

(f) Each parent or guardian of a youth tackle football participant shall receive concussion and head injury information for that athlete pursuant to Section 124235 and the Opioid Factsheet for Patients pursuant to Section 124236.

(g) Each football helmet shall be reconditioned and recertified every other year, unless stated otherwise by the manufacturer. Only entities licensed by the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment shall perform the reconditioning and recertification. Every

reconditioned and recertified helmet shall display a clearly recognizable mark or notice in the helmet indicating the month and year of the last certification.

(h) A minimum of one state-licensed emergency medical technician, paramedic, or higher-level licensed medical professional shall be present during all preseason, regular season, and postseason games. The emergency medical technician, paramedic, or higher-level licensed medical professional shall have the authority to evaluate and remove any youth tackle football participant from the game who exhibits an injury, including, but not necessarily limited to, symptoms of a concussion or other head injury.

(i) A coach shall annually receive first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and automated external defibrillator certification.

(j) At least one independent nonrostered individual, appointed by the youth sports organization, shall be present at all practice locations. The individual shall hold current and active certification in first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator, and concussion protocols. The individual shall have the authority to evaluate and remove any youth tackle football participant from practice who exhibits an injury, including, but not limited to, symptoms of a concussion or other head injury.

(k) Safety equipment shall be inspected before every full-contact practice or game to ensure that all youth tackle football participants are properly equipped.

(l) Each youth tackle football participant removed pursuant to this section shall comply with Section 124235. The injury shall be reported to the youth tackle football league.

(m) Each youth tackle football participant shall complete a minimum of 10 hours of noncontact practice at the beginning of each season for the purpose of conditioning, acclimating to safety equipment, and progressing to the introduction of full-contact practice. During this noncontact practice, the youth tackle football participants shall not wear any pads, and shall only wear helmets if required to do so by the coaches.

(n) A youth sports organization shall annually provide a declaration to its youth tackle football league stating that it is in compliance with this article, and shall either post the declaration on its internet website or provide the declaration to all youth tackle football participants within its youth sports organization.

124242. On and after January 1, 2021, a youth tackle football league shall comply with both of the following:

(a) Establish youth tackle football participant divisions that are organized by relative age or weight or by both age and weight.

(b) Retain information from which the names of individuals shall not be identified for the tracking of youth sports injuries. This information shall include the type of injury, the medical treatment received by the youth tackle football participant, and return to play protocols followed by the participant pursuant to subdivision (l) of Section 124241.

124243. Nothing in this article shall prohibit any youth sports organization or youth tackle football league from adopting and enforcing rules intended to provide a higher standard of safety for youth tackle football participants than the requirements established under this article.

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