

Eye Sports Injuries

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Extraordinary advances have occurred during my twenty-three years at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary regarding increasing awareness of sports-related eye injuries and, more importantly, regarding prevention of such injuries. One of the pioneers in this area, Dr. Paul Vinger, of the Lexington Eye Associates, in Lexington, Massachusetts, was almost single-handedly responsible for legislation requiring protective face and eye wear in school hockey programs.

In 1996, approximately 100,00 sports-related eye injuries occurred; 90% of these, it is estimated, could have been prevented by wearing eye protection. Philadelphia Eagle football star, Jermaine Mayberry, has teamed up with the American Academy of Ophthalmology to promote mandatory eye protection for children participating in school-sponsored athletics. Mr. Mayberry is particularly sensitive to eye health-related matters, since he is legally blind in his left eye as the result of undiagnosed amblyopia (lazy eye) in childhood. News release matters from the American Academy of Ophthalmology this Spring disclosed that Mr. Mayberry had contributed \$100,000 of his signing bonus with the Philadelphia Eagles to create the Eagles' Eye Mobile, a traveling eye clinic that helps underprivileged children receive free eye examinations and eyeglass prescriptions. Working with Mr. Mayberry as a spokesperson, the American Academy of Ophthalmology launched its campaign for mandatory eyewear for children participating in school-related or community-related athletic events this Spring. The Academy recommends that young athletes wear shatter proof goggles, constructed of 3 mm polycarbonate (20 times stronger than ordinary eyeglasses), that are fitted by an eyecare professional. This is an especially important target population, since eye injuries are the leading cause of blindness in children, with sports activities being the major cause of eye injuries in school-aged children, and up to 30% of the injuries occurring in children under the age of sixteen.

Many people find it surprising that sports such as tennis and golf are associated with substantial numbers of eye injuries, since the sports most commonly associated with eye injuries (baseball, basketball, soccer, football, and hockey) receive the most attention. Indeed, baseball is by far the most dangerous, for children 5 to 14, with basketball the most responsible for eye injuries (33% of injuries) in individuals between the ages of 15 and 24.

The experience in Canada with respect to face masks required in organized amateur hockey (90% reduction in hockey-related eye injuries), and the experience in organized youth baseball in the United States, has prompted several cities across the USA (for example, Chicago and New Orleans) to crusade for mandatory eye protection for their children participating in school-sponsored athletics. We join the American Academy of Ophthalmology and these far-sighted city government boards in urging all of our patients and parents of children everywhere to lobby for and support mandatory eye protection for young athletes in their hometown.