

## In All Sports, Kids Need To “Play It Safe”

(NAPSA)—It’s something parents have to face. Sports injuries to the face and mouth can happen in the flick of a puck or the kick of a ball. The good news is most of these injuries can be prevented by wearing the proper protective gear. This is especially important for those who wear braces.

“I’ve seen too many children and adults ruin their healthy, beautiful smiles—or worse—because they fail to wear a mouth guard,” says Donald R. Joondeph, D.D.S., M.S., orthodontist and American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) president. “Precaution and common sense are key to preventing injuries.”

Mouth guards are one of the least expensive pieces of protective equipment available. Over-the-counter versions cost as little as \$5, although custom-fit mouth guards offer greater protection. Not only do mouth guards save teeth and protect jaws from harm, they may also protect against injuries to the neck and central nervous system by decreasing the force transmitted through the jaw to the base of the skull.

However, mouth guards can provide protection only when they are worn. So parents and coaches should remind youngsters to always wear them when participating in any activity during which the mouth might come into contact with a hard object or the pavement.

Consistent use of other safety equipment is important, too. Mandated for many organized sports, helmets save lives and prevent head injuries. Face guards, devices made of plastic or metal that attach to baseball helmets, also help to prevent facial injuries.

How can kids and other ath-



**Gear Up**—If an activity carries the risk of dental or facial injury, wear protective equipment, such as mouth guards like those pictured above.

letes play it safe? Just remember these important tips:

- **Wear mouth guards for contact sports.** Mouth guards can help prevent jaw, mouth and teeth injuries and are less costly than recovering from the injury.

- **Wear a helmet.** Helmets absorb the energy of an impact.

- **Wear protective eyewear.** Eyes are extremely vulnerable.

- **Wear a face shield to avoid scratched or bruised skin.** Hockey pucks, basketballs and racquetballs can do severe damage.

- **Be alert even as a spectator.** Alert spectators can avoid foul baseballs and flying hockey pucks. Watch your step when climbing bleachers.

- **Use common sense.** If an activity carries risk of dental/facial injury, gear up. Without it, even a basketball game could land you or a loved one in the emergency room.

For more information about orthodontics or for the names of AAO member orthodontists in your area, visit [www.braces.org](http://www.braces.org) or call 1-800-STRAIGHT (1-800-787-2444). Your dentist can also provide recommendations on orthodontists near you.