

Summer Sports Safety Tips: Plastic Gear Helps Keep Kids In The Game

(NAPSA)—From neighborhood parks and swimming pools to local bicycle paths, this summer millions of children will be participating in their favorite recreational activities. Across the nation, scooters and bicycles, baseball bats and soccer balls, tennis rackets and skates, are out for summer fun in the sunshine.

Unfortunately, experts say too few children are wearing the proper safety equipment and this is causing millions of injuries and even death. Every year, more than 3.5 million children under the age of 14 suffer from sports-related injuries, making them the most frequent cause of injury for adolescents in the United States.

“This summer, while we are teaching our kids how to catch a ball or ride a bike, we should also show them how to protect themselves and their dreams. It can literally save lives,” said Michelle Klein, founder and executive director of the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation, a non-profit agency.

While the number of children who get hurt playing sports is alarming, the good news is advances in plastics technology mean lightweight, sturdy safety gear is accessible to the more than 30 million kids who participate in organized sports each year.

In fact, this athletic safety gear and other plastic safety devices (car safety seats, seat belts, smoke detectors, personal flotation devices) are a crucial part of the 46 percent decline in the unintentional injury-related death rate among children 14 and under during the past two decades, according to the National SAFE KIDS

Campaign. Unintentional injuries are the number one killer of children in this age group.

“Try to imagine a piece of sports safety equipment that isn’t made of plastic—helmets, mouth guards, face masks, goggles and even sneakers are made better and safer because of plastic” said Klein. “Simply put, most sports safety equipment is made of plastic because of its unique combination of strength and flexibility, plus it’s easily moldable to help ensure proper fit.”

Helmets



Most helmets have a hard, crack-resistant plastic outer shell, designed to mitigate an impact by spreading the force over a greater area of the head and by reducing friction in a slide. Soft plastic inner cushions provide proper fit while the helmet’s liner can be made of a stiff polystyrene plastic foam that requires a certain minimum force before it starts to crush. Testing procedures for helmets have been set by organizations including Snell Memorial Foundation, American National Standards Institute and the Consumer Products Safety Commission.

A helmet’s ability to protect depends on its construction, fit

and condition. Helmets used for many years by a team or passed down in a family may be soft, cracked or have stretched inserts that make a proper fit impossible. Parents should also select a helmet based on what sport their child will be playing.

Mouth Guards

Plastic mouth guards help prevent injury to the mouth, teeth, lips, cheeks and tongue. Even with a mouth guard it is still possible for a child’s tooth to be knocked out; however wearing one greatly reduces the risk. Research has also suggested that mouth guards are effective in reducing the concussion risk due to elevated jaw injury after blows to the chin. Because plastic materials are easily molded yet retain strength, most mouth guards are made of rubber or a flexible polyvinyl plastic.

Plastic Goggles, Face Screens and Masks

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission and National Society to Prevent Blindness, the four activities producing the most eye injuries are basketball, baseball, swimming pool sports and racket/court sports.

Selecting the proper protection depends on the level of risk characteristic of the sport a child will be playing. Because polycarbonate lenses are lightweight, yet withstand most blunt forces without shattering, three of the four main types of protective eye gear are made of this plastic. Parents should contact their eye care professional to assist in selecting the right protective eye gear for their child.

For more information, visit the National Youth Sports Safety Web site at www.nyssf.org.