

Children's Health



School Days Mean Back To Mouthguards For Student Athletes

(NAPS)—Up to 60 percent of student athletes will experience a sports-related dental injury and some 30 percent of all sports injuries are related to the mouth and teeth, making mouthguards an important part of school equipment for those who play sports.

While mouthguards are often mandated for football, hockey and lacrosse, facial injuries are common in other sports and activities as well, including basketball, baseball, skateboarding, and bicycling.

More on mouthguards

So, what are they? A mouthguard is a polymer rubber material which, when worn, adds a protective layer to reduce the potential for dental injuries. Mouthguards help cushion a blow to the face, minimizing the risk of broken teeth and injuries to students' lips, tongue, face, and jaw. These injuries can be both costly and painful, so are worth preventing.

According to the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation, students who don't use mouthguards are 60 times more likely to suffer an injury to their mouths than those who do, making the devices an effective solution for preventing chipped teeth, cuts to the cheek or lips, tooth loss, and nerve damage.

Expert opinions

The American Dental Association (ADA) agrees. To prevent injuries to the face and mouth, the ADA recommends the use of mouthguards in both games and practice for 29 sports.

Many families opt for off-the-shelf, so-called "boil and bite" mouthguards, which are cost-effective, but less comfortable and durable than custom mouthguards. Custom mouthguards, made by a dentist, which require mouth molds, are more expensive but fit more comfortably. These mouthguards stay in place better, are resistant to tearing and breaking, and are easier to breathe and speak with while worn. Because they are custom fit based on an individual's particular teeth and anatomy, they also have the tendency to not cause a vomiting reflex.

If a student athlete wears braces, a mouthguard is even more important, as the braces can cause lacerations of the



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mouth. Orthodontists can provide braces-appropriate mouthguards.

Just as with seatbelts in the '60s and bicycle helmets in the '70s, mouthguards are the latest safety innovation to protect young people. "Sports have become an integral part of maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle. It is important to prevent sports-related injuries whenever we can, and the easiest way to do so is wearing protective gear," says Nadia Fugate, DMD, a licensed dentist who serves as a Delta Dental of Washington dental consultant. "Mouthguards are just as important in preventing physical injuries as helmets, padding, and gloves."

Dr. Fugate's friend and former patient, Julie Cohn, MD, agrees, noting the importance of mouthguards for not only the individual wearing the mouthguard but for the other athletes on the field. "I wear a mouthguard for all contact sports. Whether rugby, roller derby or softball, they have protected my teeth and tongue from what could have been serious injuries. After a collision where another athlete's teeth lead to 30 stitches in my head, it's the one piece of gear I don't play without."

Get one, and then, keep it clean

It's important to keep a mouthguard clean before and after use. To clean your mouthguard:

- Rinse it and brush it in cool water after each use. Let it air dry.
- Keep it away from extreme heat and keep it in a plastic case when not in use.
- Store the mouthguard out of reach of pets.
- Bring your mouthguard to dental checkups for inspection, fitting, and professional cleaning.

Many dental benefit programs cover mouthguards; check with your plan to see if you have any benefits related to mouthguards.