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[News and Publications](#)

• [Ophthalmology Journal](#)

• [EyeNet Magazine](#)

• [Washington Report](#)

• [Academy Express](#)

• [News Releases](#)

• [EyeOrbit](#)

• [Ophtholinx](#)

American Academy of Ophthalmology Urges Athletes to Wear Protective Eyewear

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SAN FRANCISCO – In recognition of April's designation as Sports Eye Safety Month, the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Eye M.D. Association, urges all athletes—and especially young athletes—to wear appropriate sport-specific protective eyewear as recommended and properly fitted by an Eye M.D. or other eye care professional. Every year, more than 42,000 sports-related eye injuries occur in the United States. More than one-third of the victims are children.

"Athletes need to choose protective eyewear because eye injuries can be devastating," said Academy spokesperson Monica L. Monica, MD, PhD, MHA. "Eye injuries are one of the leading causes of visual impairment in children. Children can incur injuries ranging from abrasions of the cornea and bruises of the lids to internal eye injuries such as retinal detachments and internal bleeding. Unfortunately, some of these young athletes end up with permanent vision loss and blindness."

Sports with the highest risk for eye injury, and for which eye protection is available, include: basketball, baseball, hockey, football, lacrosse, fencing, paintball, water polo, racquetball, soccer and downhill skiing. Athletes today can choose from various types of lightweight and sturdy protective eyewear that look and fit better than in the past. Eyewear properly fitted and worn does not hinder performance in any way, and can prevent 90 percent of sports eye injuries. In Canada, eye injuries decreased by 90 percent after certified full-face protectors attached to headgear were made mandatory in organized amateur hockey.

Protective eyewear lenses should be made of polycarbonate, which is 20 times stronger than typical eyewear lenses. Polycarbonate can withstand impact from a ball or other projectile traveling at 90 miles per hour. Contact lenses offer no protection, and street wear glasses are inadequate to protect against any type of eye injury.

Because many children's sports leagues, schools and teams don't require children to wear eye protection, parents must insist that children wear eye protection every time they play, and set a good example by wearing eye protection themselves when playing sports. In addition, parents can get involved to help pass local ordinances requiring children under the age of 16 to wear protective eyewear when engaging in sports.

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