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Vision for the Future

Every year Americans incur more than 42,000 sports-related eye injuries, 40 percent of which happen to children 15 and younger. As sobering as that is, what's even more distressing is that almost all of them are preventable. The simplest—and most effective—solution is to make sure the young athlete in your family wears eye protection. To help, we found some of the best eye-protection products for the 10 sports in which eye injuries most often occur. These products are well made yet, where possible, score enough style points that your child will have no fear of looking like the team mascot. So let the games begin—but safely.

- **BASKETBALL AND RACQUETBALL** Rec Specs, one of the top makers of sports goggles, has produced a stylish line that even the most fashion-conscious teen will like. The Maxx series of goggles features tough polycarbonate lenses, padding at the bridge of the nose and on the sides, and cool colors and styles. For younger jocks, try Maxx 20 or Maxx 21. For older athletes, Maxx 30 and Maxx 31 come in a larger sizes and are equally sleek.
- **WATER POLO** Whether from fingernails, a ball in the face, or pool chemicals, eyes are particularly vulnerable to injury in this sport. The Kaiman goggle by Aqua Sphere has a sturdy lens set inside a pliable frame that softens the impact of a blow to the face. Larger than typical goggles, the lenses fit around the outside of the eye socket. The goggles provide 180-degree vision and come with anti-fog coating and UV protection.
- **BASEBALL** Kids suffer more eye injuries from baseballs than parents realize. Wilson's A5259 youth batting helmet with face mask meets standards set by the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) and is available at sporting goods retailers. Rawlings makes a batting helmet that meets NOCSAE standards set specifically for girls. The helmet, Item No. PL1W-FG, even has an opening in the rear for a ponytail to escape. The same Rec Specs goggles recommended for basketball and racquetball are a good alternative to baseball batting-helmet face masks and can be worn out on the field as well as at bat.
- **HOCKEY** For ice hockey, the FM8000 True Vision face mask is one of the best. Its carbon steel wire meets industry standards for toughness and is painted with a titanium finish that reduces glare. Masks tend to work better than shields, which offer better visibility in theory because they have no bars, but they can fog up and become scratched when handled carelessly.

PRICES AND PLACES

The Kaiman goggle by AquaSphere (below), costs about \$15 at specialty swim stores, or go to www.aquasphereusa.com to find a store near you.



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▪ **FOOTBALL** Bangerz Sports Eye Protection makes a polycarbonate eye shield, suitable for all ages, that fits metal and plastic face masks on football helmets. That's a good thing in a sport where players' eyes can end up in painful contact with dirt, mud, or fingers. The eye shield also protects against Ultra Violet (UV) rays and comes with an anti-fog inner and outer coating and anti-scratch coating.

▪ **LACROSSE** In this sport, guys wear a helmet with a mask; girls typically wear just a mask. (There is rarely contact between players in girls' lacrosse, so except for goalies, a helmet isn't required). In either case, Cascade makes some of the best headgear. For young men, the best bet is the CPX titanium helmet. The titanium makes it about one-third lighter than most masks. The sculpted visor and chin guard make it a style favorite with teens, as does the array of custom-color combinations. For young women, the Iris is an extremely lightweight wire-frame eye mask that can take a ferocious 60-mph shot.

▪ **FENCING** North Carolina-based Triplette Competition Arms' Italian-made masks are great for teens. Stock No. 1999 can be customized with school colors or other flourishes added to the bib of the mask. Better still, it provides solid padding to protect the face, throat, and top of the head, yet isn't bulky or uncomfortable.

▪ **PAINTBALL** Paint pellets travel at half the speed of a bullet fired from a high-powered pistol. The nVader mask, made by JT USA, can withstand such punishment while also providing protection to a young marksman's mouth, ears, and forehead. The goggles have an anti-fog coating for clear vision. And the space alien resemblance has made them popular with teenage paintball players. Slightly less popular with them, but a hit with their moms, is JT's Headshield, a lightweight helmet that also shields the back and front of the head in addition to the face.

▪ **DOWNHILL SKIING** Bolle makes a couple of sets of goggles especially suitable for younger skiers. The Scream model has a clever double lens that is double-ventilated to reduce fogging, plus it's coated with an anti-fog product. The Scream also has an adjustable headband that can fit over a helmet. It provides 100-percent UV protection, and lenses are available in a variety of colorful tints. Another Bolle model, Jinx goggles, are similar to the Scream, but slightly smaller, making them a better fit for younger teens or those with smaller faces. ☺

LARRY KELLER

PRICES AND PLACES

• RecSpecs (top), about \$100 at most eyewear stores; call 800/444-5010 for information.

• nVader paintball mask (above), about \$35 at paintball stores or www.jtusa.com.

Additional gear, left, from top to bottom:

• Rawlings youth batting helmet, about \$30 at sporting goods retailers.

• Triplette Competition Arms fencing masks, about \$85; www.triplette.com.

• Cascade lacrosse helmets, \$70 for Iris mask, about \$270 for the CPX; www.cascadelacrosse.com.

• True Vision FM8000 face mask about \$40; or go to www.bauer.com.

Not shown:

• Bolle ski goggles, Jinx, \$90; Scream, \$110, order at www.bolle.com.

• Bangerz eye protection, about \$11, more info at www.bangerz.com.