

## TEACH YOUR KIDS TO SWITCH THEIR GLASSES BEFORE THE GAME AND ODDS ARE YOU WON'T BE TEACHING THEM TO READ WITH THEIR FINGERS...



Wearing everyday sun or corrective eyewear when playing sports can turn a minor bump in the face into a gaping hole in the eyeball. Street eyewear and sports don't mix – it puts athletes big and small at risk of serious eye injury and simply does not belong on the playing field.

Approximately 25% of the estimated 2.4 million eye injuries that occur in the United States each year happen during sports and recreational activities. That's why The American Academy of Pediatrics and other prominent medical organizations strongly recommend the use of protective eyewear when playing baseball, basketball, softball, soccer, football, tennis and other sports that represent a risk of eye injury.

So why do we still see kids on the field in streetwear?

In order to help people understand the risks of sport eye injuries and preventative alternatives available for young athletes, we created the **Coalition To Prevent Sports Eye Injuries** – a nationwide network of eye care professionals dedicated to the prevention of eye injury in sport.

Just go to [www.sportseyeinjuries.com](http://www.sportseyeinjuries.com) and plug in your zip code to find a Coalition approved **Sports Injury Prevention Center** in your area.

And don't wait until it's too late to protect the sight of your young athletes.

**SOMETIMES PREVENTION IS THE ONLY CURE**

## **A SPRAINED ANKLE CAN'T CHANGE YOUR CHILD'S LIFE. AN EYE INJURY CAN...**

Thirty percent of sports-related eye injuries in children have the potential to cause a permanent loss of eyesight. And in the United States, more than 600,000 athletes suffer sports eye injuries every year – almost all of which could have been prevented with the right protective equipment.

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The Coalition To Prevent Sports Eye Injuries provides athletic directors, coaches, parents and players with a local resource for information about the risk and prevention of sports eye injuries, as well as ASTM certified protective equipment. Just go to our practice locator at [www.sportseyeinjuries.com](http://www.sportseyeinjuries.com) and plug in your zip code to find a Sports Injury Prevention Center near you.



**VISION – IT'S A GIFT WORTH PROTECTING**

## **BROKEN BONES HEAL. PUNCTURED EYES DON'T.**

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**HOW IMPORTANT IS YOUR CHILD'S VISION?**

## **DON'T WAIT FOR A DEBILITATING EYE INJURY TO FIND OUT THAT ALMOST ALL EYE INJURIES CAN BE PREVENTED...**

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**HELP THEM SEE TO PLAY ANOTHER DAY**

## GLASSES CAN DAMAGE YOUR EYESIGHT – PERMANENTLY



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## **SWAPPING SPECS BEFORE THE GAME IS A LOT EASIER THAN SURGICALLY REMOVING LENS FRAGMENTS FROM YOUR EYEBALL...**



The American Academy of Pediatrics knows that recreational eye injuries are a serious problem in this country – that’s why they strongly recommend the use of protective eyewear when playing baseball, basketball, softball, soccer, football, tennis and other sports that represent a risk of eye injury.

Unfortunately a lot of athletic directors, coaches and parents don’t know about the risks of sports eye injuries or preventative alternatives available for young athletes. Which is why we created the Coalition To Prevent Sports Eye Injuries – a nationwide network of eye care professionals who represent a knowledgeable source of risk and prevention information, as well as a choice of certified protective equipment appropriate for the majority of sports.

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## Sports Eye Injuries – Maneuvering Out Of The Country’s Blind Spot

Every thirteen minutes an emergency room in the United States treats a sports eye injury that could have been prevented<sup>1</sup>.

An estimated two and a half million eye injuries occur in the US each year. Approximately forty thousand result in a permanent loss of vision<sup>2</sup>. More than a quarter of these injuries take place during sports or recreational activities and are almost entirely preventable with the use of the right protective equipment<sup>3</sup>.

The frequency, severity and preventability of recreational eye injuries has prompted the American Academy of Pediatrics and other prominent medical institutions to issue policy statements strongly recommending the use of protective eyewear when participating in risk-prone sports. The US Department of Health and Human Services has made “increasing the use of protective eyewear” in recreation and hazardous situations an objective of its *Healthy People 2010* initiative. But despite the fact that the medical community has made its position clear, the majority of athletic programs, schools, parents and players aren’t even aware that sports eye injuries are a problem. And every thirteen minutes an emergency room treats another preventable sports eye injury.

Given the consensus in the medical community, it is a virtual certainty that the use of protective eyewear will be legally mandated for risk-prone sports at some time in the future. But legislation can be a long and bureaucratic process. For example, the first bicycle helmet standard was introduced in 1970, but states did not begin to mandate usage until the middle of the 1990’s. In the twenty-five years between introduction and mandating, riders suffered approximately five million bicycle-related head injuries – an estimated 85% of which could have been prevented through the use of helmets<sup>4</sup>.

Legislation regarding the use of protective eyewear will likely be bogged down by arguments regarding potential cost barriers and the negative affects on sports participation. And every thirteen minutes an emergency room treats another preventable sports eye injury.

Dr. Paul Berman, former Chairman of the AAO Sports Vision Section, eye doctor to professional sports teams and a leading authority on the risk and prevention of recreational eye injuries, believes that it’s possible to begin saving eyes today. “It’s a matter of building up community resources already in place and giving people the tools they need to step up to responsibilities intrinsic to their existing positions,” said Dr. Berman. “With the right mix of education and communication, coordinated through key groups supporting the population at greatest risk, it is possible to give people a practical choice to protect their eyes when participating in sports.”

Based on eye injury research to date<sup>5</sup>:

- Young people are at the greatest risk of sports eye injury – sixty-six percent of all sports eye injuries occur in participants between the ages of five and twenty-four.
- The majority of recreational eye injuries occur in organized team sports – basketball, baseball, football, soccer, hockey, volleyball and other ball sports are responsible for almost fifty-five percent of all sports eye injuries.

According to Dr. Berman, reducing the problem of eye injuries in the youth organized sport population can be triggered by an effective approach targeting two main groups:

- **Eye Care Professionals:** There are approximately 30,000 eye care professionals practicing in the United States. Less than a quarter of these practices carry protective eyewear, and only a small percentage represent a knowledgeable resource for the risk and prevention of sports eye injuries. Mobilizing applicable eyecare practitioners into a visible network and supporting them with educational resources to ensure a knowledgeable and consistent risk/prevention approach to sports eye injuries is a major component in addressing the problem.
- **Community Sports Leaders:** Team sports involve coaches, officials and directors that that represent authority figures regarding participation risks and safety precautions for players and their parents. The majority of these authority figures lack the tools to communicate even the most basic information on eye injury risks specific to their sport, and are currently unable to recommend a local resource for further education and effective prevention. The choice to prevent sports eye injuries through the use of protective equipment will never be practical unless it is channeled through the schools, athletic organizations, trainers, coaches and officials that are sporting authorities in the eyes of players and parents.

In June of 2005, Dr. Berman created the **Coalition To Prevent Sports Eye Injuries**, launching a two-pronged strategy aimed at:

- Mobilizing members of the eyecare community into a consistent and identifiable sports injury prevention resource network
- Collaborating with national sports and preventative health organizations to engineer grass-roots communications and educational approaches capable of raising awareness

regarding both the risk of recreational eye injuries as well as the availability of the Coalition’s practice network as a preventative resource

The Coalition is outfitting its member network of **Sports Eye Injury Prevention Centers** with the educational tools necessary to effectively address sport-specific injury risks and provide a consistent range of prevention alternatives to local athletic communities. In collaboration with prominent sports and injury prevention organizations, it is also working to raise awareness among schools, athletic program administrators, trainers, coaches and officials regarding basic eye injury risks as well as the ready availability of its practice network. Through a combination of these efforts, the Coalition hopes to offer parents and players a realistic choice to protect their eyes when participating in sports and recreational activities.

“A grass-roots initiative like the Coalition is an essential next-step to the institutional policy statements and federal objectives announced within the past couple of years. Our job is to build upon the definitive position of the medical community through a practical approach that can really impact on the number of sports eye injuries that happen every year,” said Dr. Berman. “Vision is a gift – and the loss of vision to preventable injuries is a life-changing tragedy. It is the duty of the eyecare community to establish resources to prevent eye injuries whenever possible, and it is the duty of authority figures in the sports community to openly communicate avoidable risks and offer solutions when available. The initial response from both the eyecare and sporting communities have been very positive, and if everyone continues to step up to their responsibilities I know that we can save a lot of eyes.”

But the Coalition doesn’t expect the work to be easy, which is why it’s starting with “bite-sized” objectives. “Our first objective is to get

streetwear off of the courts and playing fields. As fashion trends continue to introduce lighter, thinner frame and lens materials, shattered streetwear can easily turn a black eye into a blind eye. While simple and intuitive, this is a crucial message for younger athletes and volunteer coaches. We think it's a good way to introduce the Coalition and at the same time take a swipe at a major cause of penetrating eye injuries." The Coalition's next step will be addressing the need for protection among high-risk sports participants that do not wear corrective eyewear.

While the Coalition supports efforts to enact legislation as a means to prevent sports eye injuries, Dr. Berman comments, "Eye care

professionals and community sports leaders can't sit around waiting for politicians to save the eyes of our kids. Protecting eyes is the responsibility of eyecare professionals – just like protecting kids is the responsibility of coaches and officials. These injuries are preventable – and if we do our jobs, they won't happen. I think the laws will eventually come, but by the time they get here I hope we no longer need them."

And maybe sometime in the future, people will look back with shock and disgust at the fact that every thirteen minutes emergency rooms used to treat eye injuries that could have been prevented.

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<sup>1</sup> *Policy Statement - Protective Eyewear For Young Athletes*, AAP Committee on Sports Medicine and Fitness, Pediatrics 2004; 113; 619-622, DOI10.52/peds.113.3.619

<sup>2</sup> Feist RM, Farber MD. Ocular trauma epidemiology. Arch Ophthalmol. Apr. 1989; 107(4): 503-504

<sup>3</sup> Jeffers JB. An ongoing tragedy: pediatric sports related eye injuries. *Semin Ophthalmol*. 1990; 5: 216-223

<sup>4</sup> Think First, National Injury Prevention Foundation, Bicycle Safety

<sup>5</sup> Based On A 1993 Sports and Recreational Eye Injury Study by Prevent Blindness America involving the study of 41,031 emergency room visits

## **WHY DON'T ATHLETES PROTECT THEIR EYES**

We all know how seriously a coach, an Athletic Director and a school system view their responsibility to protect an athlete. We have, depending on the sport, helmets, elbow pads, shin pads, shoulder pads and appropriate footwear. Yet, we do not have a policy to protect eyes. The sad thing is over 90% of these injuries are preventable.

The reason is that until now no one has sufficiently focused on the need to protect the eye. The Federal Government addressed this need in Healthy People 2010, a document that states the health goals of our country. Of the ten objectives addressing vision, Objective 28.9 states, "Increase the use of appropriate personal protective eyewear in recreational activities and hazardous situations around the home".

In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Optometrists and the American Optometric Association, are only a few of the many organizations that have offered position papers and strongly recommend increased utilization of sports protective eyewear.

There are estimates of over 600,000 sports related eye injuries per year and approximately 40,000 require trips to the emergency room. That means every thirteen minutes an emergency room treats another preventable sports eye injury

But despite the fact that the medical community has made its position clear, the majority of athletic programs, schools, coaches, parents and players, aren't even aware that sports eye injuries are a problem. Here are some simple statistics that should help convince you:

- Young people are at the greatest risk of sports eye injury – sixty-six percent of all sports eye injuries occur in participants between the ages of five and twenty-four.
- The majority of recreational eye injuries occur in organized team sports – basketball, baseball, football, soccer, hockey, volleyball and other ball sports are responsible for almost fifty-five percent of all sports eye injuries.

The Coalition to Prevent Sports Eye Injuries was created to educate the eye care community, schools, coaches, recreation directors, parents and athletes on the wisdom to eliminate this preventable and tragic loss of vision.

A large emphasis is being placed on educating coaches of the risk of eye injuries and how to prevent them as they have the closest relationship with the players and are the source of most protective information. Each sport presents its own risks but Dr. Paul Berman, the Chairman of the Coalition, will review the major sports and risks. He truly believes that knowledge of the risks and availability of the appropriate product will decrease the needless loss of sight caused by eye injuries.

Schools and coaches should also know that one in eight people who suffer a serious injury and one in 20 less severely injured people institute legal action. So to avoid injuries and legal action, below is a list of risk information by sport:

- Baseball
  - Approximately 1 in 50 Little League players will sustain an eye injury that requires attention
  - Estimated over 2,000 baseball players blinded by sports eye injuries
  - 57.3% of all eye injuries occur in children under age 14
  - Injury from a batted ball is 361% more likely than a pitched ball
  - Women's softball ½ the eye injury rate of men's baseball
  - 2/3 of all eye injuries occur on the field
- Basketball
  - Basketball runs the greatest risk of eye injury requiring ER visits
  - One in 10 college basketball players suffer an eye injury each season
  - Over an eight year career 1 in 13 male players will suffer serious and/or debilitating eye injury
  - One in 20 NBA injuries involve the eye
  - One in every six professional basketball players suffer an injury every 18 months
  - An estimated 2800 basketball players are blinded each year
- Soccer
  - Leading cause of eye injury in Europe
  - 80% of all eye injuries caused by ball (blunt trauma)
  - 55.4% of injuries occur in 6-14 years olds
  - Approximately 1 in 50 soccer players will suffer an eye injury in the course of an eight year career
  - Soccer allows street eyewear but not protective eyewear (will be changed)
- Football
  - The average football team will experience four eye injuries each season, and one severe eye injury every two seasons
  - Age statistics:
    - Approximately 49.9% of all football eye injuries occur in players aged 6 to 14 years old
    - Approximately 45.4% of all football eye injuries occur in players aged 15 to 24 years old
- Racket Sports
  - Leading cause of eye injury in adult women
  - In Canada – 24.5% of all eye injuries. 8.8% blinded by sports
  - In US – 40.3% sports related eye injuries. 23% cases hyphema (blood in the eye)
  - Survey American Amateur Racquetball Assoc., 61% of members and 77% of former officials think eye protection should be mandated
- Hockey
  - Perfect example of how preventable eye injuries are with the mandated use of face shields in every level except professional hockey.
  - 100% of all eye injuries are prevented, eliminating 71,000 and over ten million dollars in cost per year.

While at this time we do not see protective eyewear being mandated for all sports, it has been for women's lacrosse, and there is pending legislation in New Jersey to eliminate street eyewear. We do feel that with appropriate education street eyewear (regular glasses) can be eliminated from the playing field and that more and more people who don't wear glasses will choose to protect their eyes with protective eyewear. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Coalition to Prevent Sports Eye Injuries at <http://www.sportseyeinjuries.com/>