

## NEWS RELEASE

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### YOUNG ATHLETES AT RISK FOR HEAT ILLNESS AS FALL SPORTS BEGIN

Prevention strategies should extend beyond just football, researchers say

INDIANAPOLIS – As the start of another school year looms and practices for fall sports begin, young athletes – and not just football players – are challenged by the hot weather and face significant heat injury and illness risks, say experts from the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM).

Education, planning, acclimatization, modification, and monitoring are all key to keeping heat injuries and illnesses at bay – effective prevention strategies that coaches supervising practices often don't implement, says Michael F. Bergeron, Ph.D., an ACSM Fellow and Trustee and one of the nation's most highly regarded youth sports heat stress experts.

“Teaching coaches the warning signs of heat illness would be a huge step toward prevention,” said Bergeron, who co-wrote the ACSM Roundtable Consensus Statement on Youth Football Heat Stress and Injury Risk. “But it's not enough. Coaches need to progressively introduce practice duration and intensity, as well as the uniform and any protective equipment, so that young athletes can safely adapt. Regular fluid breaks should be mandatory and practice should be appropriately modified for safety as the heat and humidity increase. Long gone are the days of refusing players water or using heat as a strategy to ‘toughen up’ a player. Unless the coach wants a collapsed athlete - or worse - on the field, it's just not acceptable. All athletes need to be closely monitored for signs and symptoms of developing heat illness, and participation should immediately stop and medical attention should be promptly sought at the earliest point of recognition.”

The National Center for Catastrophic Injury Research, commissioned by the National Federation of State High School Associations, says that “heat-related deaths continue to be the cause of a majority of indirect deaths” in high school sports. In the report, heat stroke and other heat illnesses were experienced in variety of sports, including cross-country running and wrestling, with wrestlers working out in heat-holding rubber suits to try to “make weight” for events. Even marching bands should be concerned and take precautions – a study at the 2009 ACSM Annual Meeting showed band participants had heat illness risk and levels similar to those of athletes.

“I've attended numerous junior tennis tournaments where kids were competing from morning to dusk in excruciatingly hot summer conditions,” Bergeron said. “Football might get the most attention for severe heat-related injuries and illnesses, but the risk in other sports is very real.”

The ACSM Consensus Statement provides helpful prevention guidelines that can be applied to all outdoor sports, not just football:

- Avoid holding practices between 12 and 4 p.m., typically the hottest hours of the day (although later hours can also be as hot or hotter).
- When heat is extreme, hold practices indoors or use outdoor practices as lighter walk-through sessions.
- Increase the frequency and duration of rest breaks in the shade during practice, and give plenty of opportunities for sufficient fluid consumption.

In addition to promoting these proven heat illness prevention strategies, ACSM is developing new initiatives to educate not just coaches and schools, but also sport governing bodies and policymakers on heat illness prevention.

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