

# Youth Hockey Head & Brain Injury Skyrockets, Especially in Girls

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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Hockey-related injuries among 9- to 14-year-old players have more than doubled since 1990, according to a recent nationwide study in the Journal of Athletic Training. The injuries studied included mouth and face injuries, [brain injury](#), and other serious injuries requiring emergency room treatment.

Serious injuries to female hockey players increased by 347 percent over the period studied, from 4.8 percent of all injuries in 1990-1999 to 8.9 percent in 2000-2006. The rate of injury went up in all of the groups studied, with the steepest increase among younger players and females. Still, the rate of injuries among players 15-18 still went up by 85 percent.

## Face Gear and Stricter Checking Rules Could Help Prevent Hockey-Related Sports Injuries

"The incidence of ice hockey injuries will likely continue to increase, given the sport's growing popularity, unless we make a concerted effort to make sure kids wear the proper protective equipment," said Jeff Deits, a former master's degree student at Ohio State University who is the lead author of the study.

According to the study's authors, hockey's popularity has grown exponentially in the past two decades, which explains some of the increase in injury rates. However, the rate of injury appears to be outpacing the growth in hockey participation.

Nearly one in four hockey injuries reported by emergency rooms over the study period were to the face or mouth. One in nine involved a concussion or brain injury.

The authors of the study suspect that players may not be consistently wearing their face masks, which could prevent many [injuries to children](#). While face masks are required during play by youth hockey leagues, they aren't required during non-contact skating drills.

"Players and coaches may think they don't need masks during skating drills, but we know from other research that when you fall on the ice, you usually injure your face because your hands slide out from under you," said Sarah Fields, a professor of physical activity and educational services at Ohio State and co-author of the study.

Another worrying finding was the dramatic increase in concussions and mild traumatic brain injury, which are nearly three times more common among players under 18 than among adults.

"The brains of children and adolescents are more likely to sustain a traumatic brain injury, even at a lesser force, than a mature brain," Deits said. "There's been more focus on traumatic brain injuries in recent years, especially among children, and that's very appropriate."

Along with helmets and face guards, stricter rules about body checking could help prevent injuries. Today, checking is allowed in pee-wee hockey, which includes players as young as 11. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that body checking be restricted to players over the age of 15.

"We can't tell for sure, but we believe that hockey is a much more serious sport now than it was in 1990, so kids are probably spending a lot more time on the ice. That results in more chances for injury," says Fields.

**Source:** PhysOrg.com, "[Serious hockey injuries among young children skyrocketing, study finds](#)," Jeff Grabmeier, September 20, 2010