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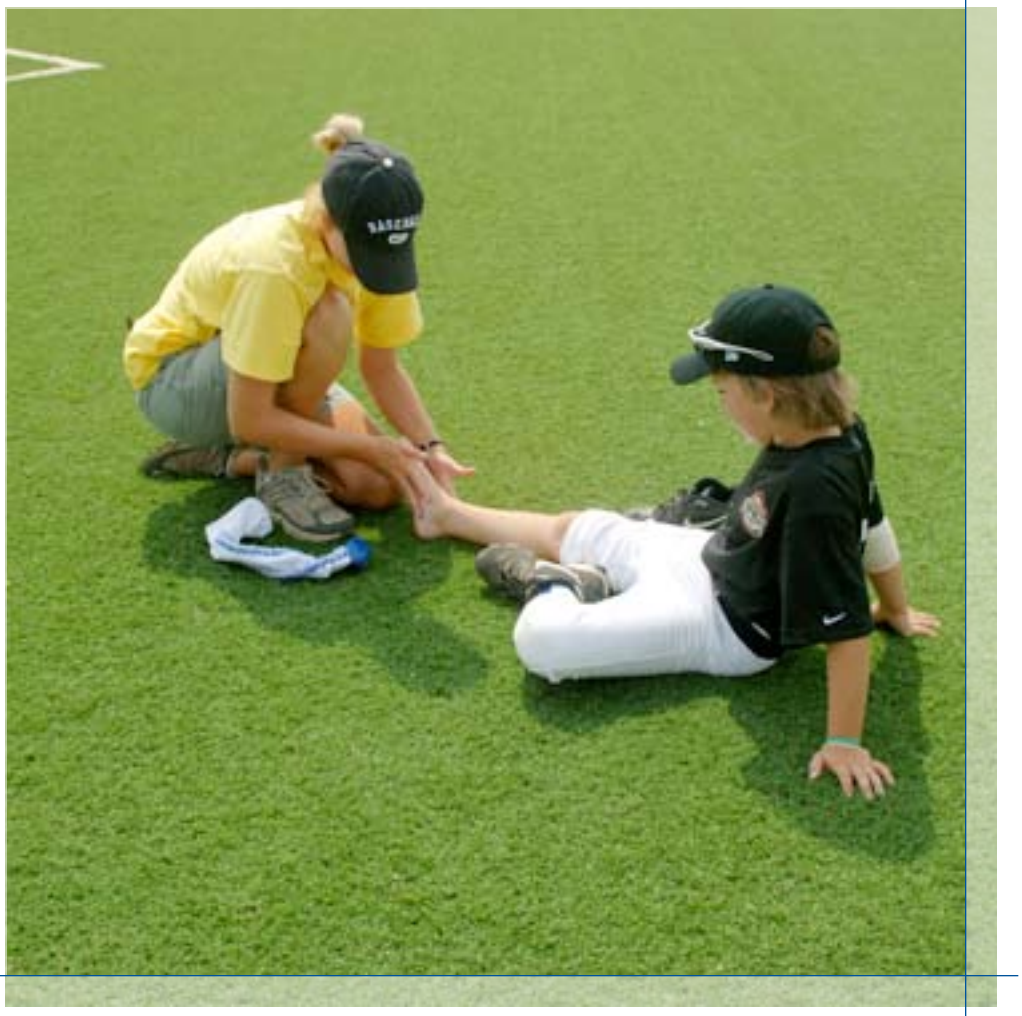
Providing for Players' Safety



One of your players rounds third and heads for home plate. The throw from the outfield arrives at home just ahead of the runner. Sliding to avoid the tag, your player catches a leg on one of the catcher's shin guards. The runner is called "safe" by the umpire, but he is not getting up and seems to be in pain. What do you do?

No coach wants to see players get hurt. But injuries remain a reality of sport participation; consequently, you must be prepared to provide first aid when injuries occur and to protect yourself against unjustified lawsuits. Fortunately, you can institute many preventive measures. In this chapter we describe

- steps you can take to prevent injuries,
- first aid and emergency responses for when injuries occur, and
- your legal responsibilities as a coach.

Game Plan for Safety

You can't prevent all injuries from happening, but you can take preventive measures that give your players the best possible chance for injury-free participation. To help you create the safest possible environment for your athletes, we explore what you can do in these areas:

- Preseason physical examinations
- Physical conditioning
- Equipment and facilities inspection
- Player match-ups and inherent risks
- Proper supervision and record keeping
- Environmental conditions

We begin with what should take place before the season begins: the preseason physical examination.

Preseason Physical Examinations

We recommend that your players have a physical examination before participating in baseball. The exam should address the most likely areas of medical concern and identify youngsters at high risk. We also suggest that you have players' parents or guardians sign a participation agreement form and a release form to allow their children to be treated in case of an emergency.

Physical Conditioning

Players need to be in, or get in, shape to play the game at the level expected. To do so, they'll need to have adequate cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness.

Cardiorespiratory fitness involves the body's ability to store and use oxygen and fuel efficiently to power muscle contractions. As players get in better shape, their bodies are able to more efficiently deliver oxygen and fuel to muscles and carry off carbon dioxide and other waste. Baseball requires a good deal of running, usually in short bursts to go from a stationary position to full speed as quickly as possible. Youngsters who aren't as fit as their peers often overextend themselves to make up for their lack of fitness, and doing so can result in lightheadedness and nausea.

An advantage of teaching baseball using the Ripken method is that kids are active during almost the entire practice; they seldom stand around in lines watching teammates take part in drills. As the season progresses, players will attain higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness simply by taking part in practice. However, watch closely for signs of low levels of cardiorespiratory fitness, and don't let your athletes do too much until they're fit. You might privately counsel youngsters who appear overly winded by suggesting that they train outside of practice to increase their fitness. Whatever training you recommend should be sport-specific, meaning that baseball players should work mostly on sprinting. It wouldn't make sense to tell a third baseman to go run 5 miles. Pitchers, on the other hand, need to build endurance, so suggesting a longer, slower run for them might make sense. If you have concerns about a player's level of fitness it is best to recommend he or she consult with a fitness professional, such as a certified strength and conditioning coach or a certified athletic trainer.

Muscular fitness encompasses strength, muscle endurance, power, speed, and flexibility. This type of fitness is affected by physical maturity as well as strength training and other types of training. Your players likely will exhibit a relatively wide range of muscular fitness. Players who have greater muscular fitness are able to run faster and throw harder. They also sustain fewer muscle injuries. Any injuries that do occur tend to be more minor in nature. And in case of injury, the recovery rate is faster in players with higher levels of muscular fitness.

Two other components of fitness and injury prevention are the warm-up and the cool-down. Although young bodies are generally very limber, they, too, can get tight from inactivity. We recommend a dynamic warm-up that incorporates each muscle group and elevates the heart rate in preparation for strenuous activity.

The ultimate goal of a warm-up, to raise the temperature of the body and specifically the muscles that will be used during the game or practice session, is much more important than performing stretching exercises. Raising the temperature of the muscles allows them to be more pliable and actually to contract more effectively. This allows your muscles to perform more efficiently and should help reduce the chances of developing a muscle-related injury.

There are three stages of a proper pregame or prepractice warm-up:

1. **General warm-up**

   This warm-up can include a very light jog, jumping rope, riding a stationary bike, or any light activity that raises the heart rate and increases blood flow to the muscles.

2. **Functional activities**

   These activities consist of multijoint movements in which the muscles and joints perform in a similar manner to how they will be used later on in the game or practice. Some examples of functional activities are body-weight squatting, lunging, lateral low walking, high-knee drills, power skips, grapevines, and shuffles.

3. **Sport-specific movements**

   This warm-up requires using movements from the specific sport or activity that is being performed but at a lesser intensity to help the body loosen up. Examples of these types of movements are batting and fielding practice, long toss, and running the bases.

Athletes can do a light stretch after any of these phases, but only after the muscles are warmed up properly. Athletes with flexibility issues should work on problem areas during training sessions in the off-season and not necessarily during a pregame or prepractice warm-up. This warm-up time is intended to prepare the muscles for how they will be used during the ensuing game or practice, not to address deficiencies that a player might have.

A team warm-up is a good way to create good habits athletes can fall back on for any sporting activity they will participate in throughout their lives. It also promotes interaction between the players, serves as a time to focus on the upcoming game or practice, and provides an opportunity for a coach to address the team about the practice plan for the day or the team's opponent.

Baserunning can be a fun and effective method of conditioning a cooling down at the end of practice. You should follow it with light stretching to help keep the muscles from getting stiff and to facilitate recovery.

Equipment and Facilities Inspection

Another way to prevent injuries is to ensure that all players are outfitted with approved equipment that is properly fitted and that the venue for the game or practice is safe for players, coaches, and spectators.

Make Sure Equipment Fits and Is Not Worn Out

This seems like an obvious safety precaution, but we all are aware that many youth baseball programs have to deal with budget constraints. Not having enough money in the budget to purchase new equipment every year can lead to equipment that is passed down and used much longer than it is functional.

Worn-out equipment is dangerous for obvious reasons. Sometimes equipment that is handed down is not meant for the age group using it. A helmet that is too large can cover a batter's eyes and prevent him or her from reacting to an inside pitch that might hit him or her. A helmet that is too small might not provide proper protection. Catcher's gear that is too large might shift and leave an area of the body exposed that shouldn't be. If the gear is too small, it might not cover all the body parts that it should. As a coach, don't be afraid to speak up and let your commissioner know that you don't have the proper equipment. Sticking to a budget is important, but not at the expense of anyone's safety. If the league won't cooperate, consider explaining the problem to your players' parents. A small donation from everyone can easily cover the cost of catcher's gear and batting helmets.

Use Appropriate Bats and Balls

It is important to understand which bats and baseballs are appropriate for the age group you are coaching. If a player can't control a bat, there is a good chance he or she might drop it or throw it in a dangerous manner. Players who still are mastering their throwing and catching skills should practice and play, when possible, using balls that are the same weight and feel of baseballs but have softer covers. The most dangerous time of some practices is the first few minutes when players who still are learning to throw and catch are warming up their arms using real baseballs. From a skill-development standpoint, players benefit as much from using standard-size balls with soft covers as they do from using real baseballs. However, using the softer balls helps to decrease the risk of an injury.

Introduce the Protective Cup

A protective cup may be the most important piece of equipment any baseball player can wear. It protects the player from serious injury and instills a greater sense of confidence. So, why wouldn't a player want to wear one? They aren't very comfortable. The earlier a player gets used to wearing a cup, the easier it will be for him to wear it consistently. After a while he won't even realize that he is wearing one. No baseball player should step on a field—especially the quality of fields most kids play on—without wearing a protective cup.

Designate an Area for Warming Up

When teams are getting ready to play, they have a desire and a need to warm up properly for the game. A warm-up can include playing catch and some sort of batting practice. If teams are playing catch on the field before the game, they should play catch in the outfield grass, preferably along one of the foul lines, with everyone throwing in the same direction. If two or three kids decide to throw in a different direction, overthrows can be dangerous to players or spectators. In addition, spectators should be sure not to set up their chairs or blankets directly behind the spot where a team is playing catch.

Teams that want to play catch and are waiting to get on a field should find an open area away from spectators. Again, the players should all throw in the same direction to avoid the possibility of an overthrow hitting a teammate. Players always should spread out as much as possible when playing catch to avoid the possibility of getting hit by a teammate's errant throw.

When there is no batting cage, teams like to get creative with their pregame batting practice, especially if they don't have access to the field. Once again it is imperative to find an open area to hit, as far away from spectators as possible. If there is no batting cage, use plastic or sponge balls. Players hitting, as well as the on-deck batters, should wear helmets at all times, regardless of the type of ball being used. Most hitting-related injuries seem to be head injuries that occur when someone without a helmet gets hit by a careless swing.

Pick Out a Safe Rooting Location

Parents usually like to sit on the same side of the field as their team's bench. And they often prefer to set up their chairs and blankets out of play farther down the baseline than where the bench is located. They usually choose this location over sitting in bleachers behind a fence or setting their chairs or blankets up behind fenced-in areas where the view might not be perfect. Often the area that they pick is in a location that is exposed to hard-hit foul balls or errant throws. This can be okay if the parents are alert and constantly paying attention to the game. More times that not, however, the game becomes a social event. Conversations distract the spectators from the game action, which means they are not prepared to protect themselves from batted or thrown balls. This becomes even more dangerous when small children are thrown into the mix without having alert adults available to protect them.

As a coach you can help your supporters pick out a safe area from which to root for the team. One idea is to have a team banner made and hung or placed in an area that is less likely to be a target for foul balls and that is safe from any potential errant throws. This area can be designated as the official rooting section, and team supporters can be directed to sit there. Another possibility is to talk to the parents to make sure that at least one person is designated to stand guard each inning. This parent can make sure to warn spectators of incoming balls and can be prepared to protect the others if necessary. Finally, it is imperative that coaches and spectators make sure that children who are playing together are far enough away from the field to be out of danger.

Assign a Coach or Parent to Bench Duty

Pick a parent or one of your assistants to be on bench duty for each game. It will be this person's responsibility to make sure the bench area is safe. The on-deck hitter should be required to wear a helmet and should be the only player other than the batter to have a bat in his or her hands. The next couple of players in the lineup should wear helmets, but they should be sitting on the bench with their teammates. It is the on-deck batter's responsibility to

pick up the hitter's bat after he or she drops it and runs to first. This should be done quickly if there is a potential play at home plate so that the runner doesn't slide into the bat and the catcher doesn't trip over it. All players not in the game should be on the bench or in the bench area. The only time they should go to play catch would be if they were warming up to come into the game. When that time comes, the person on bench duty should make sure that they throw in a safe location away from any potential batted or thrown balls as well as any spectators. If a pitcher must warm up to go into a game at a location that is near the playing field, it is the responsibility of the coach to make sure that a player, coach, or parent is there to stand in front of the pitcher and protect him or her from batted or thrown balls.

Walk the Field Before the Game

You should walk the entire field before any game or practice to get a feel for any areas that might be dangerous. Look for bumpy ground, holes or gullies, large rocks, broken glass, or anything else that could cause an injury. Make sure that dangerous items are removed from the field and players are informed of any areas of the field that might potentially cause an injury so that they can try to avoid them. If you are practicing and the infield seems excessively rough or dangerous, you might want to take your infielders to a flat, grassy area or a blacktop so that they can practice the proper techniques without having their bodies take a beating. It's very hard, not to mention dangerous, to teach a young player how to field properly if he or she is being bruised by balls that constantly are taking bad hops.

Keep Their Heads in the Game

Baseball, by its nature, is a game that features a substantial amount of down-time and standing around. It is imperative to impress upon your players the concept of a proper ready position and to keep them focused on the game. Coaches are supposed to be paying attention to every pitch, so it shouldn't be too hard to verbally remind your players to be prepared before each pitch. Remind them how many outs there are, and make sure they don't have their hands on their knees. They should be in an athletic stance with their bodies square to home plate. Make sure the players understand the game situation and are aware which bases the ball might be thrown to if it is hit. This can help avoid a player making a throw to a teammate who is not expecting it.

Teach the Proper Fundamental Techniques

Many of the fundamental drills in this course will teach players to approach the game in such a way that they will be less likely to put themselves in potential injury situations.

Vision is the most important defense mechanism on the baseball field. If the player can see the ball and the glove (ground balls and throws should be caught out in front of the body and fly balls should be caught with two hands over the head) or can see the pitch with both eyes, he or she is more

likely to catch or get out of the way of a ball that takes a bad hop or to get out of the way of an inside pitch. Don't be afraid to throw foam rubber balls at your team in practice to teach them how to get out of the way of pitches. Turn batting practice into a dodgeball game one day. The players will have fun with it while learning how to protect themselves. Ultimately that will give them more confidence at the plate.

For a skill such as bunting, it is easier for a player who pivots on both feet to get out of the way of an inside pitch than for a player who squares his entire body to the pitcher. Also, when it comes to bunting, the top hand should never be wrapped completely around the bat.

Player Match-Ups and Inherent Risks

We recommend that you group teams in 2-year age ranges if possible. You'll encounter fewer mismatches in physical maturation with more narrow age ranges. Even so, two 12-year-old boys might differ by 90 pounds in weight, a foot in height, and 3 or 4 years in emotional and intellectual maturity. This presents dangers for the less mature. Whenever possible, match players against opponents of similar size and physical maturity. Such an approach gives smaller, less physically mature youngsters a better chance to succeed and avoid injury while providing the more physically mature players with a greater challenge. Closely supervise games so that the bigger players do not put the smaller at undue risk.

Proper matching helps protect you from certain liability concerns. But you must also warn players of the inherent risks involved in playing baseball, because failure to warn is one of the most successful arguments in lawsuits against coaches. So, thoroughly explain the inherent risks of baseball and make sure that each player knows, understands, and appreciates those risks.

The preseason parent-orientation meeting is a good opportunity to explain the risks of the sport to both parents and players. It is also a good time to have both the players and their parents sign waivers releasing you from liability should an injury occur. Such waivers do not relieve you of responsibility for your players' well-being, but lawyers do recommend them.

Proper Supervision and Record Keeping

To ensure players' safety, you will need to provide both general supervision and specific supervision. General supervision is being in the area of activity so that you can see and hear what is happening. You should be

- immediately accessible to the activity and able to oversee the entire activity,
- alert to conditions that may be dangerous to players and ready to take action to protect them, and
- able to react immediately and appropriately to emergencies.

Specific supervision is direct supervision of an activity at practice. For example, you should provide specific supervision when you teach new skills and continue it until your athletes understand the requirements of the activity, the risks involved, and their own ability to perform in light of these risks. You need to also provide specific supervision when you notice either players breaking rules or a change in the condition of your athletes.

As a general rule, the more dangerous the activity, the more specific the supervision required. This suggests that more specific supervision is required with younger and less-experienced athletes.

As part of your supervision duty, you are expected to foresee potentially dangerous situations and to be positioned to help prevent them from occurring. This requires that you know baseball well, especially the rules that are intended to provide for safety. Prohibit dangerous horseplay, and hold practices only under safe weather conditions. These specific supervisory activities, applied consistently, will make the environment safer for your players and will help protect you from liability if a mishap does occur.

For further protection, keep records of your season plans, practice plans, and players' injuries. Season and practice plans come in handy when you need evidence that players have been taught certain skills, whereas accurate, detailed injury report forms offer protection against unfounded lawsuits. Ask for these forms from your sponsoring organization and hold on to these records for several years so that an "old baseball injury" to a former player doesn't come back to haunt you.

Environmental Conditions

Most problems caused by environmental factors are related to excessive heat or cold, though you should also consider other environmental factors such as severe weather and pollution. A little thought about the potential problems and a little effort to ensure adequate protection for your athletes will prevent most serious emergencies that are related to environmental conditions.

Heat

On hot, humid days the body has difficulty cooling itself. Because the air is already saturated with water vapor (humidity), sweat doesn't evaporate as easily. Therefore, body sweat is a less effective cooling agent, and the body retains extra heat. Hot, humid environments make athletes prone to heat exhaustion and heatstroke (see more on these in "Serious Injuries" on pages 34-36). And if *you* think it's hot or humid, it's worse on the kids—not only because they're more active, but also because youngsters under the age of 12 have a more difficult time than adults regulating their body temperature. To provide for players' safety in hot or humid conditions, take the following preventive measures.

- **Monitor weather conditions and adjust practices accordingly.** Figure 3.1 shows the specific air temperatures and humidity percentages that can be hazardous.

Temperature (°F)	Humidity	Precautions
80-90	<70%	Monitor players prone to heat illness
80-90	>70%	5-min rest after 30 min of practice
90-100	<70%	5-min rest after 30 min of practice
90-100	>70%	Short practices in evenings or early morning

Figure 3.1 Warm-weather precautions.

- **Acclimatize players to exercising in high heat and humidity.** Athletes can make adjustments to high heat and humidity over 7 to 10 days. During this time, hold practices at low to moderate activity levels and give the players water breaks every 20 minutes.
- **Switch to light clothing.** Players should wear shorts and white T-shirts when heat and humidity conditions become hazardous.
- **Identify and monitor players who are prone to heat illness.** Players who are overweight, heavily muscled, or out of shape are more susceptible to heat illness than athletes who work excessively hard or who have suffered heat illness before. Closely monitor these athletes and give them water breaks every 15 to 20 minutes.
- **Make sure athletes replace water lost through sweat.** Encourage your players to drink 1 liter of water each day outside of practice and contest times, to drink 8 ounces of water every 20 minutes during practice or competition, and to drink four to 8 ounces of water 20 minutes before practice or competition.
- **Replenish electrolytes lost through sweat.** Sodium (salt) and potassium are lost through sweat. The best way to replace these nutrients is by eating a normal diet that contains fresh fruits and vegetables. Bananas are a

Water, Water Everywhere

Encourage players to drink plenty of water before, during, and after practice. Because water makes up 45 percent to 65 percent of a youngster's body weight and water weighs about a pound per pint, the loss of even a little bit of water can have severe consequences for the body's systems. And it doesn't have to be hot and humid for players to become dehydrated. Nor do players have to feel thirsty; in fact, by the time they are aware of their thirst, they are long overdue for a drink. A cooler of water and cups, or a water fountain, should be readily accessible during all practices and games. Young players should never be denied an opportunity to get a drink of water if they ask for permission to get one.

good source of potassium. The normal American diet contains plenty of salt, so players don't need to go overboard in salting their food to replace lost sodium. Sports drinks such as Gatorade also are designed to replace electrolytes.

Cold

When a person is exposed to cold weather, the body's temperature may drop to levels that are below normal. To counteract this reaction, the body shivers and reduces the blood flow to gain or conserve heat. But no matter how effective its natural heating mechanism is, the body will better withstand cold temperatures if it is prepared to handle them. To reduce the risk of cold-related illnesses, make sure players wear appropriate protective clothing, and keep them active to maintain body heat. Also monitor the windchill (see figure 3.2) factor. Extended exposure to excessively cold temperatures, in extreme cases, can lead to frostbite and hypothermia. While baseball is not likely to be played in conditions that might lead to frostbite, a cold, wet environment can lead to hypothermia if athletes are not properly equipped to face the elements.

Temperature (°F)

Wind speed (mph)	0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40
	Flesh may freeze within one minute								
40	-55	-45	-35	-30	-20	-15	-5	0	10
35	-50	-40	-35	-30	-20	-10	-5	5	10
30	-50	-40	-30	-25	-20	-10	0	5	10
25	-45	-35	-30	-20	-15	-5	0	10	15
20	-35	-30	-25	-15	-10	0	5	10	20
15	-30	-25	-20	-10	-5	0	10	15	25
10	-20	-15	-10	0	5	10	15	20	30
5	-5	0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35

Windchill temperature (°F)

Figure 3.2 Windchill factor index. The shaded area shows temperatures at which flesh may freeze within one minute.

Severe Weather

Severe weather refers to a host of potential dangers, including lightning storms, tornadoes, hail, and heavy rains (which can cause injuries by creating sloppy field conditions).

Lightning is of special concern because it can develop quickly and cause great harm or even kill. For each 5-second count from the flash of lightning to the bang of thunder, lightning is 1 mile away. A flash–bang of 10 seconds means

lightning is 2 miles away; a flash–bang of 15 seconds indicates lightning is 3 miles away. A practice or competition should be stopped at least temporarily if lightning is 6 miles away or closer (flash–bang of 30 seconds). Athletes and spectators should already be in a safe location by the time the flash–bang reaches 30 seconds. They should stay there and play should remain halted until 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder or visible lightning flash.

Safe places in which to take cover when lightning strikes are fully enclosed metal vehicles with the windows up, enclosed buildings, and low ground (under cover of bushes, if possible). It's not safe to be near metallic objects—flag poles, fences, light poles, metal bleachers, and so on. Also avoid trees, water, and open fields. Because many athletes and spectators will flee to automobiles for cover in cases of severe weather, it is important to remind them to keep their windows up and to avoid touching any metal objects that are inside the vehicle.

Cancel practices and/or games when under either a tornado watch or warning. If for some reason you are practicing or competing when a tornado is nearby, you should get inside a building if possible. If not, lie in a ditch or other low area or crouch near a strong building, assuming a position in which you can use your arms to protect your head and neck.

The keys to handling severe weather are caution and prudence. Don't try to get that last 10 minutes of practice in if lightning is on the horizon. Don't continue to play in heavy rains. Many storms can strike both quickly and ferociously. Respect the weather, and play it safe.

Air Pollution

Poor air quality and smog can present real dangers to your players. Both short- and long-term lung damage are possible from participating in unsafe air. While it's true that participating in clean air is not possible in many areas, restricting activity is recommended when the air-quality ratings are worse than moderate or when there is a smog alert. Your local health department or air-quality control board can inform you of the air-quality ratings for your area and whether restricting activity is recommended.

Responding to Players' Injuries

No matter how good and thorough your prevention program is, injuries may occur. When injuries do arise, chances are that you will be the one in charge. The severity and nature of the injury will determine how actively involved you'll be in treating the injury. But regardless of how seriously a player is hurt, it is your responsibility to know what steps to take. So, let's look at how you should prepare to provide basic first aid care to your injured athletes, how to take the appropriate action when an injury does occur, and how to properly respond in more serious emergency situations.

Being Prepared

Being prepared to provide basic emergency care involves three steps: being trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid, having an appropriately stocked first aid kit on hand at practices and games, and having an emergency plan.

CPR and First Aid Training

We recommend that all coaches receive CPR and first aid training from a nationally recognized organization (the National Safety Council, the American Heart Association, the American Red Cross, or the American Sport Education Program). You should be certified based on a practical test and a written test of knowledge. CPR training should include pediatric and adult basic life support and obstructed airway procedures.

First Aid Kit

A well-stocked first aid kit should include the following:

- List of emergency phone numbers
- Change for a pay phone (or cell phone and charged battery)
- Face shield (for rescue breathing and CPR)
- Bandage scissors
- Plastic bags for crushed ice (make sure you bring ice or that ice is available at all game or practice sites)
- 3-inch and 4-inch elastic wraps
- Triangular bandages
- Sterile gauze pads—3-inch and 4-inch squares
- Saline solution for eyes
- Contact lens case
- Mirror
- Penlight
- Tongue depressors
- Cotton swabs
- Butterfly strips
- Bandage strips—assorted sizes
- Alcohol or peroxide
- Antibacterial soap
- First aid cream or antibacterial ointment
- Petroleum jelly
- Tape adherent and tape remover
- 1-1/2-inch white athletic tape
- Prewrap
- Sterile gauze rolls
- Insect sting kit
- Safety pins
- 1/8-inch, 1/4-inch, and 1/2-inch foam rubber
- Disposable surgical gloves
- Thermometer

Emergency Plan

An emergency plan is the final step in preparing to take appropriate action for severe or serious injuries. The plan calls for three steps:

1. *Survey the scene to make sure the area is safe for you and the injured athlete.*

   Evaluate the injured player. Your CPR and first aid training will guide you here.

2. *Call the appropriate medical personnel if appropriate.*

   If possible, delegate the responsibility of seeking medical help to another calm and responsible adult who is on hand for all practices and games. Write out a list of emergency phone numbers and keep it with you at practices and games. Include the following phone numbers:

   - Rescue unit
   - Hospital
   - Physician
   - Police
   - Fire department

   Please note that in most communities, dialing 911 will suffice for any emergency needs.

   Take each athlete's emergency information to every practice and game (see the Resources section of your online course). This information includes the person to contact in case of an emergency, what types of medications the athlete is using, what types of drugs he or she is allergic to, the signed parental waiver to transport or treat, and so on.

   Give an emergency response card (see the Resources section of your online course) to the contact person calling for emergency assistance. This provides the information the contact person needs to convey, and knowing that everything he or she needs to communicate is on the card will help keep the person calm. The person making the call should be prepared to communicate the address and location of the field, the phone number from which he or she is calling, the symptoms being experienced by the injured athlete, and the care being given. Also complete an injury report form for any injury that occurs and keep it on file.

3. *Provide first aid.*

   If medical personnel are not on hand at the time of the injury, you should provide first aid care to the extent of your qualifications. Again, while your CPR and first aid training will guide you here, the following are important guidelines:

   - Clear the scene of any objects that could make it unsafe.

- Do not move the injured athlete if the injury is to the head, neck, or back; if a large joint (ankle, knee, elbow, shoulder) is dislocated; or if the pelvis, a rib, an arm, or a leg is fractured.
- Calm the injured athlete, and keep others away from him or her as much as possible.
- Evaluate whether the athlete's breathing is stopped or irregular, and if necessary, clear the clogged airway with your fingers.
- Check for signs of breathing and circulation.
- Administer artificial respiration if the athlete's breathing has stopped. Administer CPR if the athlete's circulation has stopped.
- Remain with the athlete until medical personnel arrive.

Emergency Steps

Your emergency plan should follow this sequence:

1. Check the athlete's level of consciousness.
2. Have a contact person call the appropriate medical personnel and the athlete's parents.
3. Send someone to wait for the rescue team and direct them to the injured athlete.
4. Assess the injury.
5. Administer first aid.
6. Assist emergency medical personnel in preparing the athlete for transportation to a medical facility.
7. Appoint someone to go with the athlete if the parents are not available. This person should be responsible, calm, and familiar with the athlete. Assistant coaches or parents are best for this job.
8. Complete an injury report form while the incident is fresh in your mind (see the Resources section of your online course).

Taking Appropriate Action

Proper CPR and first aid training, a well-stocked first aid kit, and an emergency plan help prepare you to take appropriate action when an injury occurs. We spoke in the previous section about the importance of providing first aid to the extent of your qualifications. Don't play doctor with injuries; sort out minor injuries that you can treat from those for which you need to call for medical assistance.

Next we look at taking the appropriate action for minor injuries and more serious injuries.

Minor Injuries

Although no injury seems minor to the person experiencing it, most injuries are neither life threatening nor severe enough to restrict participation. When such injuries occur, you can take an active role in their initial treatment.

Scrapes and Cuts When one of your players has an open wound, the first thing you should do is put on a pair of disposable surgical gloves or some other effective blood barrier. Then follow these four steps:

1. *Stop the bleeding by applying direct pressure with a clean dressing to the wound and elevating it.*

   The player may be able to apply this pressure while you put on your gloves. Do not remove the dressing if it becomes soaked with blood. Instead, place an additional dressing on top of the one already in place. If bleeding continues, elevate the injured area above the heart and maintain pressure.
2. *Cleanse the wound thoroughly once the bleeding is controlled.*

   A good rinsing with a forceful stream of water, and perhaps light scrubbing with soap, will help prevent infection.
3. *Protect the wound with sterile gauze or a bandage strip.*

   If the player continues to participate, apply protective padding over the injured area.
4. *If the bleeding is not controlled with pressure or elevation, notify appropriate medical personnel immediately.*
5. *Remove and dispose of gloves carefully.*

   Doing so will prevent you or anyone else from coming into contact with blood.

For bloody noses not associated with a serious facial injury, have the athlete sit and lean slightly forward. Then pinch the athlete's nostrils shut. If the bleeding continues after several minutes, or if the athlete has a history of nosebleeds, seek medical assistance.

Treating Bloody Injuries

You shouldn't let a fear of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) stop you from helping a player. You are only at risk if you allow contaminated blood to come in contact with an open wound, so the surgical disposable gloves that you wear will protect you from AIDS should one of your players carry this disease. Check with your director or your organization for more information about protecting yourself and your participants from AIDS.

Strains and Sprains The physical demands of baseball practices and games often result in injury to muscles or tendons (strains) or to ligaments (sprains). When your players suffer minor strains or sprains, immediately apply the PRICE method of injury care:

P Protect the athlete and injured body part from further danger or trauma.

R Rest the area to avoid further damage and to foster healing.

I Ice the area to reduce swelling and pain. (Do not place an ice bag directly on the skin.)

C Compress the area by securing an ice bag in place with an elastic wrap.

E Elevate the injury above heart level to keep the blood from pooling in the area.

Bumps and Bruises Inevitably, baseball players make contact with each other and with the ground. If the force applied to a body part at impact is great enough, a bump or bruise will result. Many players continue playing with such sore spots, but if the bump or bruise is large and painful, you should act appropriately. Use the PRICE method for injury care, and monitor the injury. If swelling, discoloration, and pain have lessened, the player may resume participation with protective padding; if not, a physician should examine the player. If you do not suspect a fracture, it is okay to splint and immobilize injured joints, however if the possibility of a fracture exists, you should notify appropriate medical personnel immediately.

Serious Injuries

Head, neck, and back injuries; fractures; and injuries that cause a player to lose consciousness are among a class of injuries that you cannot and should not try to treat yourself. In these cases you should follow the emergency plan outlined on pages 30-32. Next we will examine more closely your role in preventing and handling three potentially life-threatening situations: shock, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke.

Shock Shock is a potentially life-threatening condition that can arise any time that an athlete has a serious injury. Common signs and symptoms of shock include sweating, feeling lightheaded or dizzy, nausea, vomiting, confusion, and irritability. If you fear that an injured athlete is suffering from the effects of shock, have someone notify emergency personnel immediately

and then loosen any restrictive clothing. Do not allow the athlete to eat or drink anything, elevate the legs slightly, and cover him or her with a blanket or something else to help maintain normal body temperature.

Please note that an athlete who has a head injury may experience symptoms similar to those of a shock victim. If the athlete has a head injury, but is not unconscious, he or she should be assisted to a sitting position in which the head is above the shoulders. Do not elevate the legs if an athlete has suffered an injury to the head. If you think the injury may be severe, do not move the athlete until medical assistance arrives.

Heat Exhaustion Heat exhaustion is a shocklike condition caused by dehydration and electrolyte depletion. Symptoms include headache, nausea, dizziness, chills, fatigue, and extreme thirst. Profuse sweating is a key sign of heat exhaustion. Other signs include pale, cool, and clammy skin; slight rise in body temperature; rapid, weak pulse; loss of coordination; and dilated pupils. See figure 3.3 for signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion.

A player with heat exhaustion should rest in a cool, shaded area; drink cool water; and have ice applied to the neck, back, or abdomen to help cool the body. You may have to administer CPR if necessary or send for emergency medical assistance if the athlete doesn't recover or his or her condition worsens. Under no cirumstances should the athlete return to activity that day or before he or she regains all the weight lost through sweat. If the player had to see a

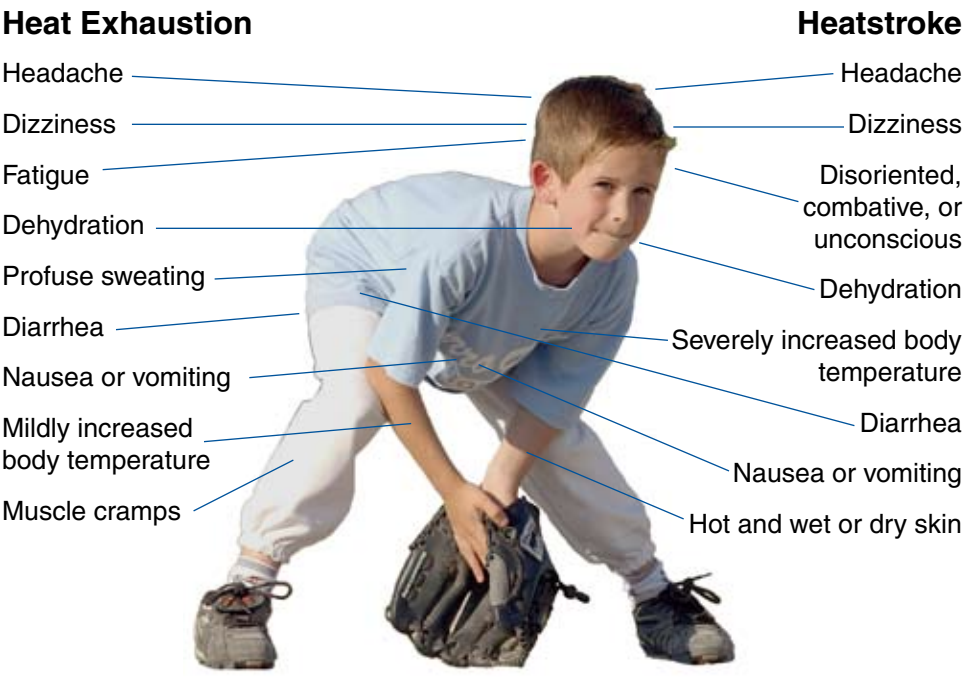


Figure 3.3 Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

physician, he or she shouldn't return to the team until he or she has a written release from the physician.

Heatstroke Heatstroke is a life-threatening condition in which the body stops sweating and body temperature rises dangerously high. It occurs when dehydration causes a malfunction in the body's temperature control center in the brain. Symptoms include the feeling of being on fire (extremely hot with body temperature rising as high as 105 or 106 degrees), nausea, confusion, irritability, and fatigue. Signs include hot, dry, and flushed or red skin (this is a key sign); lack of sweat; rapid pulse; rapid breathing; constricted pupils; vomiting; diarrhea; and possibly seizures, unconsciousness, or respiratory or cardiac arrest. See figure 3.3 for signs and symptoms of heatstroke.

Send for emergency medical assistance immediately, and have the player rest in a cool, shaded area. Remove excess clothing and equipment from the player, and cool the player's body with cool, wet towels or by pouring cool water over him or her. Apply ice packs to the armpits, neck, back, abdomen, and between the legs. If the player is conscious, have him or her drink cool water. If the player is unconscious, place the player on his or her side to allow fluids and vomit to drain from the mouth.

An athlete who has heatstroke may not return to the team until he or she has a written release from a physician.

Protecting Yourself

When one of your players is injured, naturally your first concern is his or her well-being. Your feelings for youngsters, after all, are what made you decide to coach. Unfortunately, there is something else that you must consider: Can you be held liable for the injury?

From a legal standpoint, a coach has nine duties to fulfill. We've discussed all but planning in this chapter. (See chapter 6 for information on developing practice plans and chapter 4 for guidance on establishing goals for your season.) The following is a summary of your legal duties:

1. Provide a safe environment.
2. Properly plan the activity.
3. Provide adequate and proper equipment.
4. Match, or equate, athletes.
5. Warn players of inherent risks in the sport.
6. Supervise the activity closely.
7. Evaluate athletes for injury or incapacitation.
8. Know emergency procedures and first aid.
9. Keep adequate records.

Keep records of your season plan and practice plans and of players' injuries. Season and practice plans come in handy when you need evidence that players have been taught certain skills, and injury reports offer protection against unfounded lawsuits. Hold on to these records for several years.

In addition to fulfilling these nine legal duties, you should check your organization's insurance coverage and your personal insurance coverage to make sure these policies will protect you from liability.