

Sports Eye Safety

No neighborhood is complete without the local park and ball field. Sports activities are enjoyed by young and old alike, but along with the fun there are risks. More than half a million sports-related eye injuries occur every year. Fortunately, most are easy to prevent with the correct eye protection. The American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strongly recommend that protective eyewear be worn for any sport with a risk of eye injury.

Each sport has its own unique risks of eye injury and requires its own type of protective eyewear. The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) sets the standards for sports eye protection. Polycarbonate lenses offer the best protection for many sports because the material is thin, lightweight and impact-resistant. They are available in most prescriptions and without a prescription. The frame should be specifically designed for sports. Regular frames can break on impact and cause further injury.

Baseball has the highest eye injury rate. Even Little League pitchers can throw a ball at up to 70 miles per hour. Faceguards on batting helmets reduce the risk of facial injury by as much as 35%. Look for faceguards that meet the ASTM F910 standards. Protective eyewear is a good idea for outfielders, too, because they also run the risk of being hit by fast-moving balls. The ASTM standard for outfielders is ASTM F803.

Basketball players have one in ten odds of an eye injury, frequently caused by the impact of another player's fingers or elbow. A great many professional players now wear goggles during the game. They are available with or without a prescription. The ASTM standard for basketball is ASTM F803.

Tennis, racquetball and badminton also are known to have high eye injury rates. With serves that can clock up to 200 miles per hour, goggles or safety glasses are essential when playing any of these sports, and should meet ASTM F803 standards.

Sports eye injuries are not uncommon and can be serious; however, they are easily preventable. If you are not sure which type of eyewear is best for the sport that you or your child participates in, your eye care professional can offer a lot of helpful information.

Sources: Prevent Blindness America, American Optometric Association, National Eye Institute

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