National Athletic Trainers' Association
Age Specific Task Force
Issue on Youth Football & Heat Related Illness

Parents, coaches, and youth football players are advised to adhere to the recommendations made in the 2002 National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Heat Illness Position Statement and the Gatorade Sports Science Institute (GSSI) Guidelines on Heat Safety in Football.(www.nata.org & www.gssiweb.com) It is important that education about heat illness and hydration occurs at all levels of football. At the youth level, parents and coaches help to prevent heat illness during the warm weather. Most youth football leagues, which include children between the ages of six through thirteen, begin their pre-season practices in the middle of July. The first full- contact activities usually begin in August, when the weather is still hot and humid, a perfect environment to cause heat illnesses.

Both the NATA and the GSSI have excellent recommendations on how to prevent heat illness in football during the warm weather. It is important that all youth football leagues review these articles and implement the recommendations into their pre-season and early season systems. These recommended guidelines include: [1, 2]

1. Proper medical coverage at all practices and games
2. Acclimate the athletes during the pre-season over a two week period
3. Allow proper fluid replacement to maintain hydration
4. Weigh in athletes before and after practices
5. Practice and rest in shaded areas
6. Have proper rest periods during and between practice sessions
7. Minimize the amount of equipment and clothing worn by players in hot and humid conditions.

By minimizing the amount of equipment and clothing worn by players in hot and humid conditions, the NATA - Age Specific Task Force recommends that all players be permitted to remove their helmets during rest breaks of both practices and games. With the football helmet on at all times in hot and humid weather, the body core temperature can increase to a greater extent and that may play a role in the development of an exertional heat illness.[2] The helmet should also be taken off in games between periods and at halftime, during hot weather. By combining proper hydration, rest, and the removal of the helmet for a period of time, this assists in the reduction of core body temperature and reduces the risk of developing a heat illness.

The NATA - Age Specific Task Force recommends that all youth football associations adhere to the guidelines and suggestions researched by the NATA and the GSSI. We hope with the implementations of these guidelines, there will be less chance of a heat related illness in youth football, in the future.

Sources:
1. Binkley HB, Beckett J, Casa DJ, Kleiner DM, Plummer PE. National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Exertional Heat Illnesses. *Journal of Athletic Training*. 2002;37(3):329-343.
2. Eichner RE. Heat Stroke in Sports: Causes, Prevention, and Treatment. *Sports Science Exchange*. 2002;15:3.

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