
news release

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Making sure students are healthy for fall sports

Full physicals recommended over 'sports-only' versions

DES MOINES, IA (July 29, 2010) – Students across the state are preparing for the new school year. And for many, that preparation includes a pre-season sports physical.

Rather than a brief, sports-oriented check-up, however, Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield recommends a full annual health maintenance exam.

“Summer is a great time for kids to get a complete look at their health before the new school year,” says Paul Karazija, M.D., Wellmark’s chief medical officer. “In addition to assessing a child’s readiness for athletics, health care providers can also offer laboratory testing, needed immunizations, and screen for important adolescent health issues like diabetes, obesity or depression.

Most schools require only minimal information from sports physicals, including height, weight, pulse, and blood pressure, a health history, and brief physical examination of the major body systems. A health maintenance exam, by comparison, includes additional elements to provide an overall evaluation of a student’s health. These include:

- Appropriate laboratory testing
- Immunizations
- Review of health and lifestyle risk factors
- Discussion of any recommended changes

For this reason, most Wellmark health insurance plans include *only* the health maintenance exam as a covered benefit, to ensure kids receive a complete annual exam.

Tips for preventing sports-related injuries

Once the season starts, both kids and parents can help prevent injuries by following a few simple guidelines.

Drink plenty of water. “Two-a-day football or volleyball practices can quickly dehydrate the body, increasing the risk for heat stroke and sunburn,” Karazija says. “Don’t simply drink water during practice, but before and after as well.”

Listen to your body. Many sports injuries are related to the stress and overuse. Aches and pains may be common, but alert the coach (and your health care provider) if you suspect a stress fracture or knee injury, or if you’re having persistent back pain. If the injury is from overuse, a day or two of rest may be all it takes to get back to full strength.

Use the right equipment. From shoes to knee pads, and swim goggles to helmets, choosing the proper safety equipment can help kids avoid injury.

Treat head injuries seriously. More and more research warns of the dangers of concussions, often caused by helmet-to-helmet contact in football, or the head slamming into the ground in any sport. “The effect of multiple concussions can be life-changing,” Karazija warns. “Don’t get back on the field without consulting your doctor first.”

Don’t come back too early after an injury. Re-injury is common when athletes return to the playing field before they have fully recovered. Missing one game now is better than missing five later.

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-30-

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