Play it Safe: Prevent Childhood Injuries on the Field
with Simple Sports Safety Precautions

Experts offer critical advice on protecting against children’s dental and facial injuries

ST. LOUIS, Mo. (April 2, 2012) – April is National Facial Protection Month, and the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO), the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS), the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), and the Academy for Sports Dentistry (ASD) are teaming up to remind parents, coaches and athletes to play it safe as they prepare to suit up for recreational and organized sports.

A child’s mouth and face can be easily injured if the proper precautions are not used while playing sports. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control, more than half of the 7 million sports- and recreation-related injuries that occur each year are sustained by youth as young as 5 years-old. Last year, the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation (NYSSF) forecasted that more than 3 million teeth would be knocked out in youth sporting events—yet, in a survey* commissioned by the AAO, 67% of parents admitted that their children do not wear a mouth guard during organized sports. The NYSSF says that athletes who do not wear mouth guards are 60 times more likely to sustain damage to their teeth. This raises a question: if mouth guards offer a simple and relatively inexpensive solution to help dramatically decrease the risk of oral injuries, why aren’t more kids wearing them?

The AAO survey* found that 84% of children do not wear mouth guards while playing organized sports because they are not required to wear them, even though they may be required to wear other protective materials, such as helmets and shoulder pads. Mouth guards can be one of the least expensive pieces of protective equipment available. Not only do mouth guards save teeth, they help protect jaws. Children wearing braces have slightly higher risk of oral injuries, including mouth lacerations, if their braces are hit by a ball or another player.

An effective mouth guard holds teeth in place, resists tearing and allows for normal speech and breathing. It should cover the teeth, and depending on the patient’s bite, also the gums. An orthodontist can recommend the best mouth guard for an athlete who wears braces. In fact, just by wearing a properly fitted mouth guard, many accidents and traumatic injuries could be prevented. The American Dental Association estimates that mouth guards prevent more than 200,000 oral injuries each year.

The dental experts at the AAO, AAOMS, AAPD and ASD urge parents/caregivers and coaches to protect young athletes as they head out this spring. How can children play it safe on the field? The AAO, AAOMS, AAPD and ASD dental experts offer these important tips:

Wear a mouth guard when playing contact sports.
Mouth guards can help prevent injury to a person’s jaw, mouth and teeth; and they are significantly less expensive than the cost to repair an injury. Dentists and dental specialists can make customized mouth guards.
Wear a helmet.
Helmets absorb the energy of an impact and help prevent damage to the head.

Wear protective eyewear.
Eyes are extremely vulnerable to damage, especially when playing sports.

Wear a face shield to avoid scratched or bruised skin.
Hockey pucks, basketballs and racquetballs can cause severe facial damage at any age.

About National Facial Protection Month
National Facial Protection Month is sponsored annually by the American Association of Orthodontists (www.mylifemysmile.org), the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (www.aaoms.org), the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (www.aapd.org), and the Academy for Sports Dentistry (http://www.academyforsportsdentistry.org/).