

FLAG FOOTBALL SAFETY

A PARENT'S GUIDE FOR KEEPING KIDS IN THE GAME

Flag football is not a contact sport, so the risk of injury is lower than in traditional football. However, knee and ankle injuries are still common. This reference guide provides information on how to care for some of the injuries that you may see in flag football.



KNEE INJURIES

A common injury in flag football is an **anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) sprain or tear**, which occurs when the knee is twisted forcefully or hyperextended. Athletes with a damaged ACL often describe a “pop” at the time of injury, followed by a lot of swelling within a few hours.

Athletes should see a pediatrician or pediatric sports medicine physician if pain and/or swelling persist. In addition:

- In younger athletes, bone maturity helps to determine the treatment plan. Injury to an open growth plate requires special consideration by a pediatric orthopedic specialist.
- Core strengthening and training in proper cutting, jumping and landing technique may help to prevent this injury.

Knee pain that comes on slowly over time can indicate other problems, such as:

- **Patello-femoral pain syndrome (Runner’s Knee)** – pain in the front of the knee related to muscle and tissue stress around the knee cap. This can be addressed with proper training in physical therapy
- **Osteochondritis dissecans** – a defect in the knee’s cartilage that can become evident over time during repetitive activity
- **Osgood-schlatter disease** – stress-related inflammation in a growth center at the front of the knee

ANKLE INJURIES

The most common injury in sports is a **lateral ankle sprain**, which occurs in flag football by rolling the ankle over the outside of the foot.

A lateral ankle sprain causes damage to the ligaments just below the bone on the outside of the ankle. In some cases a “pop” is felt or heard by the athlete. Treatment varies with the severity of the injury:

- Mild sprains require rest but not necessarily medical treatment.
- Injuries with persistent swelling, pain or any deformity should be seen by a physician.

HEAD INJURIES

A **concussion** is a brain injury usually caused by a sudden jolt or a blow to the head or neck that disrupts normal brain function. An athlete does not need to be knocked out or have memory loss to have suffered a concussion.

You may observe that an athlete with a concussion:

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Forgets plays
- Has behavior or personality changes
- Is unsure of game, score or opponent
- Can’t recall events either before or after hit
- Loses consciousness

An athlete with a concussion may have:

- Headache
- Concentration or memory problems
- Nausea
- Double or fuzzy vision
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Feelings of being “in a fog”
- Sensitivity to light or noise

FLAG FOOTBALL SAFETY (CONT.)

Call for immediate medical help if your child displays:

- A headache that gets worse or lasts for a long time
- Confusion, extreme sleepiness or trouble waking up
- Vomiting (more than once)
- Seizures (arms and legs jerk uncontrollably)
- Trouble walking or talking
- Weak or numb arms or legs
- Any other sudden change in thinking or behavior

BRUISES, BUMPS, TWISTS & MUSCLE STRAINS

These can affect all areas of the body.

Recommended treatment is the **PRICE** formula:

Protect the area with a sling or crutches, if necessary.

Rest the injured area.

Ice the injury for 20 minutes at a time. Do not apply the ice directly to the skin.

Compress the injured area with a wrap. Do not pull tightly, as this can cut off circulation.

Elevate the injured area above the heart.

DEHYDRATION

Flag football players are at risk of **dehydration** if they don't get enough fluid to replace what is lost through the skin as sweat and through the lungs while breathing. It is important to drink plenty of fluids before, during and after a workout or game. An athlete's performance can be impacted by even mild dehydration. Athletes should take a water bottle to school and drink between classes and during breaks so that they are well-hydrated before their workout. In addition:

- Water should be readily available when working out.
- Athletes should drink often, ideally every 15 to 30 minutes.
- Sports drinks are recommended for activities lasting longer than one hour to replace sugar and salt as well as water

Early signs of dehydration can be non-specific and include fatigue, nausea, decreased athletic performance, headache, apathy, irritability and thirst. Signs of advanced dehydration include dark urine, decrease in reaction time, dry lips and mouth and disorientation.

SSM HEALTH CARDINAL GLENNON SPORTSCARE

SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare is the premier pediatric sports medicine provider in St. Louis and St. Charles. We provide exclusive, direct access to comprehensive medical care for young athletes. By working with multiple specialists and care partners, we guarantee your child will get the top care that is best suited to treat their unique injury, improving recovery time and outcome.

Specialists your child has access to through SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare include orthopedists, pulmonologists, cardiologists, radiologists, neurologists, emergency medicine physicians, adolescent medicine physicians, rehabilitation specialists, physical therapists, nutritionists and pediatric psychologists.

Partners your child has access to through SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare include SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, SSM Health

Orthopedics, SSM Physical Therapy and SLUCare, Physician Group of Saint Louis University. We also keep kids in the game through educational programs and support for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic health.

For more information about SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare or to find a specialist for your athlete, call us at **314-577-5640** or visit us at cardinalglennon.com/sportscare.

Expert care for young athletes by SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital and SSM Health emergency medicine specialists, **24 hours a day in the ER** at: SSM Health DePaul Hospital, SSM Health St. Clare Hospital, SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - Lake Saint Louis, SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - St. Charles.



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