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## High School Football May Lead to Undiagnosed Head Injuries

It's no surprise that high-school football is a dangerous sport. Allowing your child to play means accepting the increased risk of torn ligaments, broken bones, and head injuries. But most recently, child safety experts have suggested that the risk of head injuries could be much higher than originally thought. First, a New York Times report found that while helmets are adequate to protect against skull fractures, they often fail to prevent concussions. More recently, a team from Purdue University found that high-schoolers can suffer concussions without showing physical symptoms, meaning they could keep playing and potentially make the injury worse.

According to that study, there are 1 million high-school football players each year. Among those players, there are 67,000 reported concussions and many more go unreported as the obvious signs of a concussion aren't apparent and players want to stay in the game. But this decision can lead to catastrophic injuries, especially when you consider that a bad football hit be ten times as strong as a rear-end car accident and three hundred times stronger than the force of gravity.

What's even scarier is that high school head injuries can also impact your teen's driving safety. Many head injuries without visible damage harm the frontal lobe, the part of the brain that monitors "executive functioning" and motor skills. As the frontal lobe develops, teenagers become better drivers and are less likely to take risks that could cause themselves harm. A partially damaged frontal lobe could compromise this important section of the brain. Other research has found that the frontal lobe does not fully develop until well into a person's 20s, so any additional harm should be avoided.

Concussions "seem to result from repetitive blows to the top-front of the head," said the Purdue report's main author. "The challenge is that we don't really have sideline tests that can evaluate visual working memory or impulse control. So it is very hard to find the players in this group. Our fear is that they go undiagnosed, keep playing, and accumulate more damage."

If your teenager plays a contact sport, guarantee that he or she does not experience harmful head injuries by ensuring that their coaches know about the dangers of undiagnosed head injuries and encourage your child to step out of the game if they are feeling sick or unusually tired.

More information:

<http://www.gjel.com/news/teen-brain-development.html>

<http://www.gjel.com/blog/high-school-head-injuries-blamed-on-football-helmet-safety-standards.html>

<http://www.gjel.com/blog/senator-urges-investigation-to-boost-helmet-safety-and-reduce-head-injuries.html>

