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### Main Menu

- [Local News](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [School](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Crime Watch](#)

[Browse The Archives](#)
[Search The Archives](#)



### Community

- [Home & Garden](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Wine Events](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Events](#)

### Commentary

- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Submit A Letter](#)

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## Make sports safer for young eyes

by Judith Lee

They say there's no time like the present, and regarding eye safety in sports, it's certainly true.

Children and teens have headed back to school, fall sports are in full swing, and most young athletes play sports without adequate eye protection.

"Statistics on sports eye injuries are concerning, given that so many injuries could be prevented with protective eyewear," noted Suzan Grimm, O.D., an optometric physician who co-owns Duvall Advanced Family Eye Care with her husband, Brad Grimm, O.D.

- 85 percent of children do not wear protective eyewear in situations that represent a risk of eye injury (National Health Survey Interview)
- More than 90 percent of all eye injuries can be prevented with the use of appropriate protective eyewear. (Prevent Blindness America)
- More than 600,000 eye injuries related to sports and recreation occur each year. 42,000 of these injuries are of a severity that requires emergency room attention. (US Product Safety Commission)

What's a concerned parent to do? Dr. Grimm recommends that parents begin by learning about the eye safety risks to their children.

"Most people don't know that many popular sports can cause eye injury. Parents also may assume that schools and coaches provide eye protection if it's needed, but this may not be true," Dr. Grimm said.

According to Sports Medicine Physical Fitness, the following sports are considered a high-to-moderate risk of eye injury: basketball, baseball, softball, lacrosse, hockey, tennis, soccer, volleyball, water polo, football, air rifle, BB gun, paintball, boxing, martial arts, cricket, squash, racquetball, fencing, badminton, fishing and golf.

Dr. Grimm says the next step is to take children to a qualified eye care practice to receive the eye protection they need.

"It's important that children receive a yearly eye exam. An up-to-date eyeglass prescription and the advice of an experienced optical professional will ensure that your son or daughter will see clearly and have the frames and lenses needed to protect the eye from high-impact sports," she explained.

A misconception is that children who do not need glasses to see clearly do not need eyewear for sports. All young athletes need to wear appropriate eye protection, Dr. Grimm says.

Here are some quick guidelines:

## Submit Community News

If you have some Local News that you would like to share with the community, please submit your short story, article, announcement or review [here](#).

- Lenses should be made of polycarbonate or PPG's Trivex monomer, materials that are significantly more impact resistant than standard plastic or glass. These materials also offer built-in protection from UV rays.
- A sturdy eyeglass frame may be adequate for some sports, but others require a safety goggle. These will provide complete protection from "finger pokes" and other direct impact.

Once your child has adequate eye protection, you must insist that he or she wear it at all times during practice and competition.

"Just like wearing seatbelts, parents must insist it be worn, or the child comes off the playing field," advised Dr. Grimm.

She suggests that parents can become advocates for sports eye safety.

A survey in Michigan showed that 97 percent of high schools did not have a sports eye safety program, but 98 percent of high school coaches would be interested in having one.

"When safety equipment becomes part of the uniform, like football helmets or batting helmets, all the children use it," observed Dr. Grimm. "We would like to see all athletes protected from eye injuries."