

Study: Majority of parents support age restrictions on tackle football

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Most parents support age limits for tackle football, according to a new study.

About half of football injuries are tackling-related, and concern has been growing about the potential long-term impacts of concussion.

While sports organizations overseeing hockey and soccer have implemented age limits on body checking and heading, respectively, those governing football have not followed suit.

Researchers set out to gauge public opinion on tackling restrictions by surveying a nationally representative group of 1,025 parents of children ages 5-18 years. They found 61% support age restrictions and an additional 24% said maybe. Among the supporters, 45% said the age limit should be middle school and 37% said high school, according to "Parents' Perspectives Regarding Age Restrictions for Tackling in Youth Football" (Chrisman SPD, et al. *Pediatrics*. April 1, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2402>).

About 63% of mothers definitively supported restrictions compared to 58% of fathers. Mothers were more likely to support limits when they had higher levels of education and if they estimated that high rates of players sustain concussions. Fathers were more likely to support restrictions if they had a child under 13 years.

"Fathers tend to view their role as exposing their children to appropriate risk and teaching them to be tough (particularly their sons), while mothers view their role as preventing injury," authors wrote.

In the 2015 policy *Tackling in Youth Football*, the AAP Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness (COSMF) laid out arguments for and against age restrictions and called for more research. On one hand, it said, the young brain is developing and should be protected. On the other hand, delaying tackling could mean players do not learn to tackle and absorb a tackle properly, which could lead to more injuries.

Authors of the new study called for the AAP to take another look at the risks versus benefits and update its guidelines.

"US parents are willing to accept age limits on tackling in youth football," they wrote. "Organizations that are responsible for shaping public discourse about this topic (such as the American Academy of Pediatrics) may find it useful to consider US parents' attitudes regarding age limits on tackling, alongside research quantifying the risk of tackling, when they revisit this topic."

Cynthia R. LaBella, M.D., FAAP, chair of the COSMF Executive Committee, wrote in a [related commentary](#) that while 3%-5% of youth players suffer concussions each season, parents in the survey significantly overestimated how often concussions occur. In addition, she said studies on long-term impacts of youth tackling are limited and conflicting, and concussion awareness and protocols have improved.

“Rules will continue to evolve as scientists, policymakers, and youth sports governing bodies work together to objectively evaluate the growing body of research ... in an effort to make targeted changes to enhance the safety of tackle football at all levels of play,” she wrote. “As physicians, we can help parents interpret the research, and provide them with the information that is missing from the headlines.”

Resources

- [AAP policy "Sport-Related Concussion in Children and Adolescents"](#)
- ["Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guideline on the Diagnosis and Management of Mild Traumatic Brain Injury Among Children"](#)
- [CDC resources including key mild traumatic brain injury recommendations and a checklist on diagnosis and management](#)
- [CDC HEADS UP materials aimed at parents, providers, coaches and schools](#)
- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org on football injuries](#)

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