



Gymnastics Hurts as Many Children as Soccer, Researchers Find

By Nicole Ostrow

April 4 (Bloomberg) -- Almost 27,000 U.S. children are hurt each year in gymnastics, making the sport as dangerous as soccer, basketball and cheerleading, according to the first national **study** of children gymnastics injuries.

Researchers estimated 425,900 children were treated in hospitals for gymnastics-related injuries from 1990 to 2005, according to the study in the April issue of the journal **Pediatrics**. Girls most often injured their upper bodies including their arms, wrists and hands, while boys more commonly had head and neck injuries, the authors wrote.

About 600,000 children are involved in gymnastics, according to the study. They should be better protected with universal rules and greater enforcement, said author **Lara McKenzie**, an assistant professor of pediatrics at **Nationwide Children's Hospital** in Columbus, Ohio, in an April 3 telephone interview.

``We certainly don't want to discourage people from doing gymnastics or from participating in sports for that matter," McKenzie said. ``We want people to be active and participate in the sports that they love, we just want them to do it in a safe way."

The researchers looked at data on 9,387 girls and 2,326 boys ages 6 to 17 who were treated in hospital emergency rooms in the 16 years that were studied. From that data, the researchers estimated the total number of injuries and found the average toll of 4.8 hurt gymnasts per 1,000 participants is as high as other popular sports.

Injuries Decline

Gymnastics injuries declined 25 percent from 1990 to 2005, according to the study. **Larry Nassar**, the national medical coordinator for **USA Gymnastics**, a governing body for the sport, attributed the injury drop to safer equipment and better safety training for coaches.

``The sport is getting safer and safer," said Nassar, an assistant professor who teaches sports medicine at Michigan State University, in a telephone interview today.

Steve Penny, president of Indianapolis-based USA Gymnastics, said the organization has conducted a safety certification program for coaches since the early 1990s. The group also offers continuing education classes for coaches.

``Gymnastics is a safe sport when done properly and when supervised properly," said Penny.

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