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National study finds more than half of cheerleading injuries in U.S. due to stunts

(Newswise)--Whether rallying the crowd at a sporting event or participating in competition, cheerleading can be both fun and physically demanding. Although integral to cheerleading routines, performing stunts can lead to injury.

Stunt-related injuries accounted for more than half (60 percent) of U.S. cheerleading injuries from June 2006 through June 2007, according to a new study conducted by researchers at the Center for Injury Research and Policy of The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

Published as a series of four separate articles on cheerleading-related injuries in the November issue of the Journal of Athletic Training, the study focused on general cheerleading-related injuries, cheerleading stunt-related injuries, cheerleading fall-related injuries and surfaces used by cheerleaders. Data from the study showed that nearly all (96 percent) of the reported concussions and closed-head injuries were preceded by the cheerleader performing a stunt.

"In our study, stunts were defined as cradles, elevators, extensions, pyramids, single-based stunts, single-leg stunts, stunt-cradle combinations, transitions and miscellaneous partner and group stunts," said author Brenda Shields, research coordinator in the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

The most common injuries were strains and sprains (53 percent) and injuries occurred most frequently during practice (83 percent). The top five body parts injured were the ankle (16 percent), knee (9 percent), lower back (9 percent) and head (7 percent).

The study also showed that nearly 90 percent of the most serious fall-related injuries were sustained while the cheerleaders were performing on artificial turf, grass, traditional foam floors or wood floors.

"Only spring floors and 4-inch thick landing mats placed on traditional foam floors provide enough impact-absorbing capacity for two-level stunts," explained Shields.

"There is a greater risk for severe injury as the fall height increases or the impact-absorbing capacity decreases, or both."

Data for the study were collected using Cheerleading RIO™, an Internet-based reporting system for cheerleading-related injuries.

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