YOUTH SPORTS
PARTICIPATION,
TRAINABILITY
AND READINESS

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CHAPTER 13; INJURY IN YOUTH SPORTS – surveillance, risk and rates

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INTRODUCTION

Injury in sport is commonly discussed in the medical and youth sport communities, but there is generally more public health concern for childhood injuries and injury-related deaths associated with automobiles (occupant and pedestrian), bicycles (especially traffic-related), firearms, drowning, fire, poison, and falls (Behrman, 2000). Nevertheless, risk of injury is inherent in sports and many other activities of childhood and adolescence. It is not clear, however, whether injuries in organized youth sports occur at a higher rate than in other activities of children and adolescents. The following statement would seem to suggest that injury in youth sport is reaching epidemic proportions:

“Around the country, doctors say it is as if they have happened upon a new childhood disease, and the cause is the overaggressive culture of organized youth sports. … They are overuse injuries pure and simple. … You get a kid on the operating table and you say to yourself, ‘It’s impossible for a 13-year-old to have this kind of wear and tear.’ We’ve got an epidemic going on” (Pennington, 2005, italics mine).

The purpose of this chapter is to review issues related to injury surveillance, risk factors for injury and rates of injury among participants in youth sports.

WHAT IS AN INJURY?

There are no standardized definitions of an injury in sport, including youth sport. For example, an injury has been defined as an incident that requires the participant to miss all or part of a practice or game (DeLee and Famey, 1992), and as a disabling event evaluated by a trainer or physician at a practice and/or game that requires cessation of play (Roberts et al., 1999). An American College of Sports Medicine Roundtable on Injuries in Youth Sports (Kohl et al., 1996) suggests that a sports injury "...is an adverse event which occurs during an organized training session, practice, and/or event, and which restricts participation in that sport for at least 24 hours." The National Athletic Trainer’s Association (NATA) injury surveillance of high school sports used an