

THE RISK OBSERVER

FLOOR HOCKEY PROGRAM SAFETY TIPS

Floor hockey is one of the most popular physical education and intramural games in the country. As the sport grows by leaps and bounds, so does the number of injuries that are caused by the way it is played, and as the number of injuries increases, so does the number and size of claims and settlements or court awards.

Kids obviously like floor hockey. Its growth in popularity attests to that. Can it be played safely? Yes, it can!

One recent injury, which resulted in the loss of vision in one eye, was settled before trial for over a half million dollars. It is estimated that a jury verdict in this case could easily have exceeded \$1,000,000 plus medical expenses.

Although the typical floor hockey puck is a relatively lightweight, hollow plastic disc, it can be propelled with tremendous force and become airborne. The easily damaged impact area of the player is the head, especially the face including the mouth, nose and eyes.

As the sport (hockey) grows by leaps and bounds, so does the number of injuries that are caused by the way it is played.

First, because of their inherent vulnerability, the eyes must be protected. This can best be done with goggles that are appropriate so they don't fog up with heat and perspiration; they must be able to accommodate glasses, at least in sufficient quantities, for those who wear corrective lenses to play; they must not reduce peripheral vision to the extent possible and they must fit well and stay put during active play. They must also be capable of being cleaned easily, and must be replaceable at a reasonable cost.

Second, limit the number of players on each team to that which can be safely accommodated by the floor area used, and which can be well officiated or coached.

Third, match the players as closely as possible in terms of size and skill development. Overmatching one player against another is a frequent cause of serious accidental injury in physical education and athletics.

Fourth, enforce the rules closely and reduce or eliminate, as far as possible, opportunities for injury. A "quick" whistle teaches the rules faster and better.



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Fifth, make sure the hockey sticks are in good condition and that the size matches that of the players. Too long a stick leaves too much of the butt end exposed for accidental jabs and pokes as well as giving the stick holder too much reason for tripping other players. Don't permit your students to emulate professional ice hockey players. Floor hockey is a game of finesse and teamwork. Keep it that way.

When accidental injuries occur, and they will, make sure you handle the matter as conservatively as possible by seeing to it that the student gets the best appropriate health care as quickly as possible.

Sixth, consider the possibility of using a puck made from a soft sponge material with a nylon cover. These are not available commercially, but some schools make them themselves for this sport.

Seventh, if you play off the wall, be sure that there are no dangerous protrusions or surfaces to injure the players. Ideally, walls will be padded for possible contact.

Eighth, do not permit checking.

Finally, protect those who are waiting to play at the ends or sidelines from flying pucks and collisions with players in the game. Remember, it can happen in your program.

The school district in which the student lost the sight in one eye had not had an injury in this sport before that happened, and has not had one since. When accidental injuries occur, and they will, make sure you handle the matter as conservatively as possible by seeing to it that the student gets the best appropriate health care as quickly as possible.

Let's not have floor hockey get branded as a dangerous game because we were unaware of the ways to keep it safe. Some manufacturers and distributors have already stopped making and handling floor hockey equipment because of the threat of liability suits resulting from accidental injuries while playing the game.



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