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'Body Checking' Not to Blame for Most Ice Hockey Injuries: Study

The majority of youth players are not hurt intentionally, researchers say

THURSDAY, August 5 (HealthDay News) -- When an ice hockey player slams an opponent against the board it may get the crowd's attention, but most injuries in youth hockey are caused by accidents, not intentional "body checking," researchers have found.

In the study, University at Buffalo researchers analyzed data from 3,000 Canadian boys in a youth ice hockey program, aged 4 to 18, and found that 66 percent of the boys' injuries were caused by accidentally hitting the boards or goal posts, collisions among teammates, or being hit by a puck. Body checking accounted for 34 percent of injuries.

The study also found that accidental injuries tended to be more severe than those caused by body checking.

The researchers were surprised by the findings, which were published online recently in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

"There is an image of body checking as a form of violence that is condoned by the game of hockey. However, this study found that body checking did not account for a large proportion of injuries. Perhaps as important, body checking did not lead to a rise in intentional injuries," study senior author Barry Willer, a professor of psychiatry and rehabilitation sciences, said in a University at Buffalo news release.

Another finding was that injuries increased along with the level of competition and players' ages.

"Game injuries were much more frequent among the highly skilled players on rep teams," during games, while injury rates during practice were low across all age groups and divisions, Willer said.

Willer noted in the news release that the study doesn't answer two persistent questions: at what age should body checking be allowed in youth hockey or should it be allowed at all?

But it does suggest that "regardless of whether young players are allowed to body check, unintentional contact with the board, the ice or other players are important sources of serious unintended injury. To avoid these accidents, hockey coaches must teach players to keep their heads up, rather than looking down at the puck," Willer said.

More information

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons offers [hockey injury prevention tips](#).

-- Robert Preidt

SOURCE: University at Buffalo, news release, July 30, 2010.

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