



MedStar Health

Sports medicine **monthly.**

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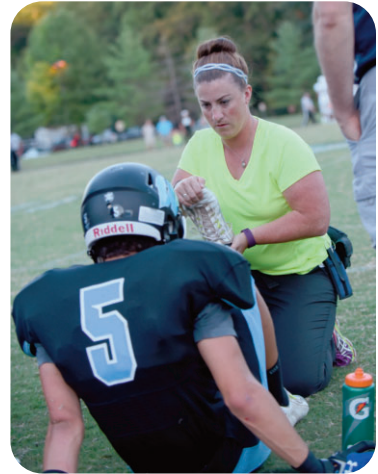
5 reasons why every high school should have an athletic trainer.

In August, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and MedStar Health announced a new partnership to enhance the school system's sports medicine program for scholastic athletics. MedStar Health's goal is to provide streamlined and enhanced care for student-athletes across all athletic programs.

In honor of National Athletic Training Month, this month's Sports Medicine Monthly is focused on why athletic trainers are so important.

Nearly 8 million high school students play sports in the United States, marking a dramatic increase in sports participation over the past several decades. With the growing number of student-athletes comes an increased chance for injuries, yet approximately one-third of secondary schools have no access to certified athletic trainers (ATCs). And of schools with access to athletic training services, only half of those schools have full-time athletic trainers on staff.

These statistics highlight a lack of appropriate sports medicine care for young athletes despite evidence that suggests full-time athletic trainer coverage can reduce overall and recurrent injuries in high school athletes. Read on to learn why athletic trainers play a valuable role in keeping high school athletes safe and healthy on the field or court.



1. Athletic trainers are certified healthcare providers that are licensed to provide medical services.



Athletic trainers (ATCs) are certified and licensed healthcare professionals who specialize in the prevention, recognition, management, and rehabilitation of both emergency and non-emergency injuries. With comprehensive training in musculoskeletal anatomy and function, as well as the clinical evaluation and treatment skills, athletic trainers provide a wide range of services designed to establish safe athletic participation.

In the absence of an athletic trainer, many high school sports programs are relying on non-medically trained individuals to recognize and manage injuries, including those that may be life-threatening. But this is a job that coaches and other well-intentioned staff aren't equipped to do. An on-site athletic trainer is trained and prepared to respond to these injuries with recognition, diagnosis, and immediate care, which can improve outcomes for athletes. By having an ATC available, coaches can focus on doing their jobs without the liability of a job they aren't trained to do.

2. Athletic trainers provide injury prevention education to parents, coaches, and athletes.

Everyone wants young athletes to safely do what they love, but sports are not without risk. While it's difficult to prevent injuries altogether, it is possible to reduce the risks associated with injury. Athletic trainers can help to monitor and employ strategies to ensure everyone is on the same page about sports appropriate protective equipment, safe training techniques, and identifying potential risk factors before an injury occurs.

Age based appropriate training guidelines and properly-fitted equipment can help to minimize the risk of severe injury, especially in the event of a concussion during contact sports. Athletic trainers utilize their training and continuing professional development to educate stakeholders in practicing safe sports.

Athletic trainers are also trained in screening and assessing athletes for potential risks for injury. One of the biggest modifiable risk factors is asymmetries from one part of the body to another. Athletic trainers can also implement these strategies following an injury, so that they can ensure an athlete has effectively rehabilitated their strength, endurance, balance, and movement patterns back to their pre-injury baseline prior to returning to play. This is in order to reduce the risk of further injury or reinjury, as seen with ACL injuries.

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3. Athletic trainers are trained to promptly recognize and treat emergency injuries before they worsen.

When an injury occurs during a practice or game, prompt identification of that injury is essential. This is especially important for emergency injuries, such as concussions, heat-related illness, or sudden cardiac arrest, which can all be life-threatening. By recognizing a potential emergency situation quickly, ATCs can ensure the athlete receives the proper care in a timely manner, which is proven to lead to the best possible outcome for the injured individual.

The key to managing these situations is being prepared. This involves creating a plan head of time so everyone knows what to do. When it comes to emergency action planning, the Maryland State Government recognized the importance of this in secondary schools last summer. Part of new regulations, under the Elijah Gorham Act, require all middle and high schools to establish clear site specific emergency action plans (EAPs) and practice those plans with all coaches. This ensures there is a detailed protocol in place for responding to emergency situations and everyone knows their role. Athletic trainers are uniquely qualified to design and implement these EAPs so that everyone on the field knows what to do in the event a young athlete experiences a head, heart, or heat-related injury or illness while playing their sport.



4. Athletic trainers help to manage injuries efficiently and with optimal recovery.

Athletic trainers serve as an extension of a multidisciplinary sports medicine team. When an injury occurs before, during, or after practice/a game, an athletic trainer can assess a student-athlete's condition immediately and determine the most efficient and effective way to manage it. Athletic trainers are skilled at triaging the athlete and helping navigate them to the most appropriate place to maximize their treatment plan. This may include referral to a sports medicine trained physician, general medical practitioner, physical therapist, or other healthcare provider. However, some injuries can be handled very easily with treatment at the school!

5. Athletic trainers ensure athlete readiness for safe return-to-play after an injury.

Having to sit on the sidelines while injured can be a difficult situation for any athlete. However, having an athletic trainer to guide them through the recovery process takes the pressure off the athlete, as well as their parents and coaches. After an injury, athletic trainers are trained to constantly assess an athlete's progress to determine whether or not it is safe and appropriate for them to return to their sport. As part of this process, athletic trainers can take athletes through sports specific activities and functional return-to-play testing. This allows the athletic trainer to identify any asymmetries in their physical capabilities or function to ensure they aren't putting themselves in a position to potentially get reinjured. Athletic trainers are there every step of the way and work one-on-one with the athlete to help them from the initial injury, all the way to their return to sport as quickly and safely as possible.

Ultimately, high school athletic trainers serve as advocates for the safety and wellness of student-athletes, making them a key part of

To learn more about your child's athletic trainer, visit their school's athletic webpage.