

Modify rules and equipment for children

- Modified games of Walla, Mini and Midi Rugby introduce children to the skills and tactical concepts of Rugby Union and emphasise sportsmanship, fair play and safety.
- Australian U19 Law variations provide safety guidelines for players, coaches and referees applicable to all matches played at U19 level.
- Safety variations such as the scrum engagement sequence introduced into Australian U19 Laws in 1986, were extended across the game at all levels in 2007.

Other safety tips

- Drink water before, during and after play.
- Wear 30+ sunscreen, appropriate clothing and a hat when playing outside.
- Telephone access, to contact emergency services, and emergency contact phone numbers should be available at all games and training sessions.

If an injury occurs

- Stop playing if you experience an injury or illness.
- Injured players should seek prompt attention from qualified first aid personnel or a sports medicine professional.
- Injuries should be fully rehabilitated before returning to play.



For further information contact

Smartplay – Sports Medicine Australia
To contact Smartplay in your state visit
www.smartplay.com.au or www.sma.org.au
Australian Rugby Union
Phone: 02 8005 5555
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References

For a full list of references, contact Smartplay.

Acknowledgments

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Preventing Rugby Union Injuries



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



Facts and Safety Tips
for Rugby Union

Facts on Rugby Union injuries

Rugby Union is a popular football code played in Australia and internationally, at all levels.

Statistics from the Australian Sports Commission's 2006 survey showed an estimated 165,300 Australians aged 15 years and older played Rugby Union in the 12 months prior to being surveyed.

Rugby Union is a contact sport with players requiring strength, speed, agility and ball handling and kicking skills. During the course of play, players aim to ground the ball over the opposing team's try line by carrying, passing, or kicking, with tackling as the main defensive feature. As a result, like in all sports, injuries can and do occur.

How many injuries?

The incidence of Rugby Union injuries has been extensively studied in the UNSW Rugby Union Injury Surveillance Study spanning eight years, showing:

- Injury rates at the elite level are greater than at the schoolboy level.
- Schoolboy injuries occur at 16 injuries per 1,000 playing hours, compared with 43 injuries per 1,000 playing hours at elite level.
- Across the sport, average injury is decreasing from 36.2 injuries per 1,000 playing hours in 2000, down to 29 injuries per 1,000 playing hours in 2006.

The causes and types of injuries

- Over 50% of injuries reported are minimal or mild, resulting in no lost games.
- Four body regions account for half of all Rugby Union injuries: shoulder (18%), knee (13%), thigh (12%) and ankle (12%).
- Sprain/strain injuries account for 58% of injuries. The tackle (52%), overexertion and overuse (14.5%) are also common.
- Independent studies have shown the tackle is the most frequent cause of injury (>50%), however it is also the most frequent event in Rugby Union. Statistics also indicate the ball carrier is twice as likely to be injured when compared to the tackler.

Safety tips for Rugby Union

Good preparation is important

- Avoid playing with a pre-existing illness or injury. If in doubt, talk to your doctor.
- Children, new players and those older than 35 years should consider undergoing pre-participation medical screening with a sports medicine professional.
- Always warm up, stretch and cool down. A warm up should consist of low intensity aerobic activity, stretching and skills practice immediately before a game.
- Undertake a training program to develop skills and techniques before competition.
- Undergo a fitness program to develop endurance, strength, balance, coordination and flexibility.

Good technique and practices will help prevent injury

- Good technique and practices are promoted through the Australian Rugby Union's SmartRugby awareness, education and injury prevention program. The program is compulsory for all coaches and referees participating in Rugby Union where there is a tackling component. For more information visit www.rugby.com.au/smartrugby
- Instruction on correct tackling technique, including falling, should be available across all levels of play.
- Tackling should be the focus of regular skills training and be progressively introduced.
- At the tackle contest, arriving players should try to remain on their feet. Training of team play for the tackle contest is important, as is the prevention of foul play.
- Players should be educated on the correct engagement sequence for scrummaging.
- Coaches/officials should be appropriately qualified and should ensure all matches are played fairly, in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

Use appropriate equipment and make the environment safe

- Clubs and schools should develop, implement and monitor sports safety risk management plans to manage injury risks.
- Ensure playing fields and facilities are well maintained and free of hazards.

Wear the right protective equipment

- Wear a mouthguard, preferably custom-fitted, at all times.
- Wear approved protective headgear to prevent lacerations and abrasions. Be aware though that the risks of concussion will not be reduced.
- Ensure boots are in good condition and use sprigs that are safe, meet specifications and are appropriate for the playing conditions.
- Protective equipment should cater to an individual's size, age and level of play.
- Consider preventive ankle taping and bracing to reduce injury risks.

