

Watch Your Mouth

April 18, 2008

Threats of serious face and mouth injuries don't appear to persuade parents that mouth guards are a necessary piece of sport equipment, says a new survey from the American Association of Orthodontists.

The findings published for April's National Facial Protection Month show that 67 percent of parents say their youth athlete doesn't wear a mouth guard despite involvement in sports such as football, ice hockey and martial arts. More than half thought their child "doesn't need that level of protection."

Although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says mouth guards are one of the key ways to avoid the risk of concussion, the equipment doesn't make the likely-to-buy list. Instead, most parents invest in protective sports gear such as shoes or cleats, helmets and head gear, shin guards and knee pads.

Mouth guards - which the American Association of Endodontists claims prevent 200,000 injuries a year - should be worn if the mouth could come into contact with the ground or a hard object. They help prevent jaw, mouth and teeth injuries, says William Gaylord, orthodontist and association president.

Endodontists suggest coaches and parents enforce mouth guards in all sports. They say an athlete is 60 times more likely to suffer a serious dental injury if they are not wearing a mouth guard. Inexpensive guards can be bought at sports supply stores, or specialists can design custom mouthguards for athletes with special needs such as braces.