

## **MAYO CLINIC STUDY CONCLUDES: FOOTBALL NO MORE DANGEROUS THAN "OTHER COMPETITIVE SPORTS"**

In a finding of enormous significance for the sport of football, especially at the youth level, a study of youth football by the prestigious Mayo Clinic, of Rochester, Minnesota showed that most of the injuries that occurred were mild, that as players got older the risk increased slightly, and that there is "no significant correlation" between body weight and injury.

The results of the study appear in the April issue of Mayo Clinic Proceedings. The conclusion, based on all data available, is that **"the risk of injury in youth football does not appear greater than the risk associated with other recreational or competitive sports."**

Said Michael J. Stuart, M.D., a Mayo Clinic orthopedic surgeon and the principal author of the study, **"Our analysis showed that youth football injuries are uncommon."**

Dr. Stuart and his colleagues studied 915 players aged 9 to 13 years, who participated on 42 football teams in fall 1997. Injury incidence, prevalence and severity of injury were calculated for each grade level, four through eight, and each player position. They further examined the incidence of injuries according to body weight.

Defining a "game injury" as any football-related ailment that occurred on the field during a game that kept a player out of competition for the remainder of the game, required the attention of a physician, and included all concussion, lacerations, as well as dental, eye and nerve injuries, the research team found a total of 55 injuries occurred in all games during the season.

According to the researchers, risk increases with level of play (grade in school) and player age. The risk of injury for an eighth-grade player was four times greater than that for a fourth-grade player. Likely reasons given were increased size, strength, speed and aggressiveness.

Expressed in terms of injuries per 1000 player-plays, the incidence ranged from .09 per cent for fourth graders to .15 per cent for seventh graders. There is a significant jump to .33 in eighth grade, but still nothing to be alarmed about.

Figure it out - with 22 players participating per play, 1,000 player-plays represents nearly 50 plays. An injury to a fourth-grader occurs roughly every 10,000 player plays (or roughly 500 plays).

Most of the injuries were mild, at that. The most common injury was a contusion, occurring in 33 players. Only four injuries (fractures involving the ankle growth plate) were severe enough to prevent players from returning to play for the rest of the season. None required hospitalization or surgery.

An analysis of body weight indicated that lighter players were not at any greater risk for injury; as a matter of fact heavier players had a slightly but not significantly higher incidence of injury.

Running backs at all levels were at greater risk when compared with other football positions.