

# STAFF INJURY RISKS DURING PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES



Physical education is an inherent part of public education. Extracurricular sports and after-school athletic activities are also valuable to students, as they expand their physical education into competitive environments with rival schools. Even games involving “students vs. teachers” can be seen as a morale builder. Despite the benefits, all of these activities carry a risk of injuries to staff as they become involved with the physical activities. A glaring issue found in schools today is that adults are being injured as they participate in various activities during the scope of their job, such as in teaching physical education, coaching extracurricular sports, or participating in games or events with students.

## RISKS:

Here are ways that school staff can become injured:

- » Coaching staff demonstrating physical tasks, such as wrestling moves, basketball drills, pole vault or discus throwing techniques.
- » Coaching staff splitting up on each side of a student volleyball practice game.
- » Physical education staff incorporating one-off curriculums such as those involving balance (i.e., rollerblading, skateboarding or gymnastics.)
- » Instructional and/or coaching staff joining students in the weightlifting room to participate in weightlifting or cardio exercises for comradery with students but also personal exercise gains.
- » Staff joining students’ tug-of-war competitions or becoming the official pitcher in a pickup game of kickball during recess at elementary schools.
- » Staff participating in sports games against students. A common event is a basketball game between teachers and students.
- » Teaching staff on field trips participating with students’ team-building physical activities.
- » Staff participating against each other in a flag football event for charity.

## BEST PRACTICES/ACTIONABLE ITEMS:

Opportunities exist to reduce the risk of injury to staff:

- » Administrators should consider developing a policy that prohibits teachers, coaches and all other staff from engaging in “hands-on” physical education, sports games and exercise equipment-related activities during their contractual work hours.

- When it is necessary for a physical education teacher or coach to explain a move or technique, this person should instead use his or her proficient students/players to demonstrate that technique.
- Coaching staff should not participate in scrimmages/games during the extracurricular sports’ practice sessions.
- Staff should not be permitted to use the school district’s weight room, exercise room or swimming pool during their contractual work hours.
- Charity games, such as flag football, or student assembly events, such as a “teachers vs. students” basketball game, should be avoided.
- Staff should use discretion in how they participate in elementary students’ activities during recess, such as becoming the official pitcher in a pickup game of kickball. Staff should maintain situational awareness to reduce risks involving being struck by a ball or struck by/ran into by a student.
- Administrators should effectively communicate policies to all district staff, including substitutes.
- » Administrators should provide a hazard analysis of “one-off” physical education curriculums to determine all the risks involved and possible injurious outcomes. If the risk of injury cannot be reduced to an acceptable level, consider omitting that particular curriculum.
- » Staff who provide instruction on physical activity curriculums should be required to don all appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and see that the PPE is maintained and used correctly. When PPE is unavailable or doesn’t afford adequate protection (worn out or doesn’t fit), the activity must be canceled until necessary PPE is available.

Teaching physical education and/or coaching extracurricular sports is part of public education, but those tasks don’t come without risks to staff. School administrators should consider feasible approaches to protecting staff from injury during the scope of their teaching and coaching duties.

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