

# More children suffer head injuries playing recreational sports than team sports

20 August 2019, by Bridie Byrne



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An Australian/New Zealand study examining childhood head injuries has found that children who do recreational sports like horse riding, skate boarding and bike riding are more likely to suffer serious head injuries than children who play contact sport like AFL or rugby.

Research, conducted by the PREDICT research network, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), published on Wiley and soon to be published in the Australian Medical Journal, examined the data of 8,857 [children](#) presenting with [head injuries](#) to ten emergency departments in Australian and New Zealand hospitals.

A third of the children, who were aged between five and 18 years, injured themselves playing sport. Of these children four out of five were boys.

Lead research author, MCRI's Professor Franz Babl, says the team looked at 'intracranial' injuries in children because while there is a lot of interest

about sport and concussion, less is understood about the severity of [head](#) injuries children suffer while playing sport.

"The study found that in children who presented to the emergency departments after head [injury](#) and participated in recreational sports like horse riding, skate boarding and bike riding were more likely to sustain serious head injuries than children who played contact sport like AFL, rugby, soccer or basketball," he says.

"We found that 45 of the 3,177 sports-related head injuries were serious and classified as clinically important Traumatic Brain Injury (ciTBI), meaning the patient required either neurosurgery, at least two nights in hospital and/or being placed on a breathing machine. One child died as a result of head injuries."

Prof Babl says that the sports which resulted in the most frequent reason for presentation to emergency departments included bike riding (16 percent), rugby (13 percent), AFL (10 percent), other football (9 percent), and soccer (8 percent).

The most frequent causes of serious injury included bike riding (44 percent), skateboarding (18 percent), horse riding (16 percent), with AFL and rugby resulting in one serious head injury each and soccer resulting none.

A total of 524 patients with sports-related head injuries (16 percent) needed CT imaging, and 14 children required surgery.

**More information:** Nitaa Eapen et al. Clinically important sport-related traumatic brain injuries in children, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2019). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.50311](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50311)

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research

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