



Media release

Sports a major cause of head injuries in children

Sports are a major cause of head injuries in children in Victoria, with Australian Rules football the most commonly involved sport.

This is the finding of a study by the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute published as an Early View (rapid online publication) in *Emergency Medicine Australasia*, the journal of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine.

Head injuries in children are common and even mild head injury can lead to ongoing cognitive and behavioural changes.

Louise Crowe, from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, with colleagues Vicki Anderson, Cathy Catroppa, and Royal Children's Hospital emergency physician Dr Franz Babl, reviewed the medical records of all sport-related head injuries in children aged 6-16 years who presented at a tertiary children's hospital emergency department over a one-year period.

During that period, there were 406 head injuries in school-age children.

Seventy per cent were male, and 33% were injured in sports.

Of these, most were classified as mild, while 13% were classified as moderate or severe.

Australian Rules football was associated with more than 30% of all head injuries attributable to a sport and recreation cause.

Eleven head injuries were classed as moderate: five from equestrian accidents, two from Australian Rules football, two from golf, and one each from cricket and hockey.

For the equestrian accidents, which included both falling off a horse and being kicked by a horse, 51% of children were recorded as not wearing any head protection.

The researchers said the data from this study very likely under-represent the total number of sport-related injuries as many children did not present to hospital, instead attending GPs or seeking no medical help.

Head injuries involving bicycles or motorcycles might have occurred during sport activities, they added.

Although research is often concerned with the long-term impact of childhood head injury, an equally important goal is the prevention of these injuries that requires the identification of the causes as a first step.

Further prevention initiatives should consider targeting Australian Rules football and equestrian activities, the researchers recommend.