Are kids taking unnecessary risks?

In a matter of seconds, a sports injury can occur to the face or the mouth. Young children ages 5 to 14 are especially vulnerable, accounting for more than 80 percent of all sports-related emergency room visits, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Because many sports injuries can be prevented by wearing the proper protective gear, why aren’t more parents, coaches and kids getting the message?

Each April during National Facial Protection Month, the American Association of Orthodontists urges athletes to “play it safe” by wearing mouth guards and other appropriate protective gear when participating in many sports and activities. According to a survey* taken by the AAO:

• 67 percent of parents surveyed said their child does not wear a mouth guard. 52 percent said that it was because their child “doesn’t need that level of protection.”

• 96 percent of parents surveyed believed their child’s coach’s role on the use/promotion of protective sports gear was “important,” “very important” or “extremely important,” yet parents surveyed reported that only 56 percent of coaches actually recommended mouth guards during competitions while 34 percent recommend them during practice.

• According to parents surveyed, the most popular sports that children wear mouth guards while playing include football (42 percent), ice hockey (52 percent) and martial arts (13 percent).

• Of the parents surveyed, the most popular form of protective sports gear for children participating in organized sports include shoes/cleats (67 percent), helmet/headgear (51 percent), shin guards (48 percent) and knee pads (34 percent).

The AAO recommends that mouth guards be worn for contact sports. Such sports include, but are not limited to, football, wrestling, basketball, baseball, volleyball, lacrosse, ice and field hockey, softball and soccer. Mouth guards also should be worn when participating in any activity where the mouth might come into contact with a hard object or the ground. Mouth guards can help prevent jaw, mouth and teeth injuries and are less costly than repairing an injury.

“I’ve seen too many children and adults ruin their healthy, beautiful smiles — or worse — because they fail to wear a mouth guard during practices and games,” says William Gaylord, DDS, MSD, orthodontist. “Precaution and common sense are key to preventing injuries.”

Mouth guards are one of the least expensive pieces of protective equipment available. An orthodontist can recommend the best mouth guard for an athlete who wears braces. (The AAO commissioned Impulse Research Corp. to conduct the AAO 2008 Protective Sports Gear Survey. The survey was conducted in February 2008 online with a random sample of 1,049 men and women, ages 18 years old or older, from the United States and Canada. Survey participants are representative of American and Canadian men and women 18 years old or older who have children between the ages of 8 and 18 who participate in organized sports.)

critical thinking, or to simply illuminate ideas, these residents must carry the torch of learning that we were so blessed to have received from our mentors; the future of orthodontics depends on our efforts. Where is Socrates when he is needed the most?

Aristotle (384-322) articulated it quite well: “The educated differ from the uneducated as much as the living from the dead” (Howe, 2005, p. 19).

References