

Safety Guidelines for Contact Sports



Ministry of Education
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Caenwood Centre
37 Arnold Road
Kingston 4

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide educators in the discipline of physical education, school-activity directors, administrators and programme leaders with basic information for planning and implementing physical education and sports and other intramural programmes for students from early childhood to Grade 12, and also at the tertiary level. In addition, the guidelines are intended to disclose and protect the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders, safeguard against injury and fatality, and prevent or minimise litigation.

All students should receive basic instruction in motor skills and sports activities through comprehensive physical education programmes. Such programmes facilitate the skills and knowledge necessary to support an active, productive and healthy lifestyle. Intramural and other physical activity programmes extend and complement physical education to ensure that all persons are given an opportunity, regardless of athletic skills, to participate in lifetime physical activity that can contribute to their enjoyment of leisure time and their emotional well-being. School-based programmes promoting and providing physical activity should be available to students at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

ORGANISATION AND ADMINISTRATION

All stakeholders must pay careful attention to the following guidelines, as they relate to the organisation and administration of instruction for physical education classes and extra-mural programmes:

- All schools and other institutions offering these programmes should employ trained and qualified teachers of physical education as well as trained and qualified coaches.
- Schools and other institutions should provide physical activity opportunities for students outside the physical education programme. Intramural programmes do not replace a physical education curriculum, but provide additional outlet for learning achieved in physical education classes.
- Intramurals should be considered an enhancement of the school's physical education curriculum.
- Intramurals should be directed by professional educators. They should have access to adequate facilities and equipment, ensure safety of participants, and be adequately funded.
- Grouping of students during physical education activities should be based on age-appropriate activities as well as consideration of skill and maturity level.
- Institutions should ensure that minimum standards are met as prescribed by the sports governing bodies to which they are affiliated - Primary Schools Sports Association (PSSA), Jamaica Independent Schools Sports Association (JISSA), Inter-Secondary Schools Sports Association (ISSA), Jamaica Inter-Collegiate Sports Association (JISA) - before participating in any sporting events.
- Schools should ensure that all sports in which they participate are run by the institutions' sports governing bodies (PSSA, JISSA, ISSA and JISA).

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Professional preparation in physical education or recreation requires appropriate qualifications for leaders responsible for intramural and physical education programmes.

Specific competencies include:

- Understanding cognitive, psychosocial, and psychomotor development of youth.
- Knowledge about components of physical fitness and appropriate training principles.
- Knowledge of particular sport and other physical activities including skills, rules and officiating techniques for a variety of occasions or event types.
- Knowledge of programme planning and various resources available for providing appropriate physical activity experiences.
- Knowledge and skills related to organising competitions (teams, ladders, tournaments, practices, rotations, etc.)
- Knowledge of sports safety requirements and first aid.

ACTIVITIES

The programme of activities should include competitions in various sports clubs and fora. Activities should be dedicated to promoting healthy lifestyles, be self-directed and be special events such as sports days, field trips, instructional and practice opportunities associated with a particular sport.

Guidelines for selection should include:

- Provision of opportunities for inclusion of male, female, and co-educational participation. Organisations should facilitate full participation of all students in all activities.
- Activities that meet the needs of all skill levels and physical abilities, including students with disabilities.
- Modification and accommodation of activities, so that they are appropriate to the age, physical development and skill levels of individual participants. In some cases, height and weight may be of more importance than age or grade level in determining groupings for team and individual competition.
- Specific rules and regulations that ensure equal opportunity, fair play, and safe participation.
- Activities that reflect student interest and provide challenge, enjoyment and moderate to vigorous activities for all participants.
- Constant liaison with classroom teachers regarding the mental health, behaviour and welfare of marginal/disabled students.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Adequate facilities and equipment are critical to support the success of physical activity programmes. Programmes may be modified and adapted to meet the budget and indoor/outdoor space available.

Basic guidelines include:

- Establishing adequate facilities to meet the needs, interests and number of participating students.
- Implementing safety standards for each activity in the programme.
- Establishing cycles and personnel for inspecting and monitoring the wear and tear of equipment.
- Discarding or repairing damaged equipment to avoid injury.
- Ensuring that the quantity and type of equipment is suited to the specific programme and meets the needs of participants so that programmes can serve the maximum number of persons under established safety standards.
- Modifying equipment according to age, size and/or physical ability of the participants.
- Implementing regular random inspections to ensure safety for all activities.

HEALTH AND SAFETY OF PARTICIPANTS

Physical activity programmes enhance the health and fitness of participants. The following guidelines are recommended:

- Stakeholders must familiarise themselves with established guidelines and policies that outline procedures for accident prevention, management of injury situations, reporting, and notification of parents/guardians in the event of an emergency.
- All activities should be structured to ensure that safety requirements are met, including consideration for each participant's readiness for the activity, based on age, skill, physical condition and level of supervision provided.
- All participants should have medical clearance to participate.
- Medical problems that may affect participation should be communicated to the programme leader. Medical clearance should be reaffirmed on a periodic basis.
- Parents/Guardians must provide informed consent for participants who are under 18 years old.
- Immediate first aid must be available from trained providers whenever the programme is in progress. First-aid equipment must be available on-site, as part of the budgeted programme, and must be regularly maintained.
- Communication channels to parents/guardians, health providers, and emergency caregivers, especially in emergency situations, must always be generally known and available.
- Student-teacher ratio must conform to Ministry of Education recommendations for both intramural and intermural operations.
- Students must be supervised at all times, while under the care of the school.
- Locker rooms (where applicable) should be supervised with clear rules for recommended student behaviour.

DAILY PHYSICAL EDUCATION ROUTINES

Provision should be made for all students at early childhood through to Grade 12 to access opportunities for daily physical exercise, because the body and mind need exercise to maintain optimum health and emotional wellbeing. This time must be dedicated to physical exercise only, and not used for any other activities.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Schools and other institutions must establish and enforce policies and practices that enable students with disabilities and other special health care needs to participate fully and safely in physical education and other physical activity programmes.

Students with disabilities need to experience the same quality of physical education and be offered equivalent opportunities to participate in physical activity offered to other students. There should, however, be modifications and accommodations to meet such special needs. These students require physical activities designed to increase physical endurance, strength, dexterity and skills. Each student with a special health care need or disability requires an assessment of how the disability or special health care need will impact or be impacted by participation in any given activity. This includes assessment of cognitive abilities and social skills. Physical activity and physical education programmes must be tailored to meet each student's specific disability and goals, and allow each one to experience success.

Based on need, physical activity for students with disabilities may be delivered in a regular physical education class or in an adapted physical education class. Sometimes specialised instruction is required for students with disabilities in order to effectively address special learning styles and modes of communication. In addition, protective equipment, safety gear and surfaces may require modifications to accommodate these students.

OUTDOOR SAFETY FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Programme managers should establish and enforce policies for participation in activities to protect students and staff from health risks and hazards. When operating outdoors the risks include overexposure to heat, inclement weather, ultraviolet radiation, air pollution, traffic, unsafe surfaces, poor lighting, and poorly maintained equipment.

The health and safety of students and staff must be considered first and foremost when making decisions about conducting outdoor physical activities.

Specific information should be made available as it relates to appropriate clothing, hydration practices, screening for signs of dehydration, rest periods, protection from sun exposure, and a plan for reaching medical assistance when necessary. The conditions under which activities will be cancelled should also be predetermined.

Play areas should be free from debris and water. Separation of motor vehicles and other traffic from play area is essential for maintaining a safe environment and reducing injuries.

Where swimming pools are part of physical education or activity programmes, safety procedures must include: maintenance of pool water chemistry, enforcing rules of appropriate student conduct, constant staff observation, supervision of all students, and the presence of staff trained in the prevention of drowning, near-drowning resuscitation, and in prevention and initial management of diving injuries. Pool rules should be posted at strategic points within the pool area.

PRE-PARTICIPATION PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

A physical examination, prior to participation in physical activity, and conducted by the student's primary care provider within a year of involvement, should be required of students participating in interscholastic sports.

Pre-participation physical examination for student athletes can identify conditions that may predispose students to injury, be life threatening, or be disabling. Such examinations should meet national regulatory or school insurance requirements.

A pre-participation physical examination allows for the counselling of student athletes on health-related issues, including mental health, and the assessment of students' fitness levels. It is extremely useful to have a standard form for purposes of documentation and continuity. Students who have been excluded from participation for reasons of illness or injury should receive an additional pre-participation physical evaluation or sports clearance examination after recovery.

When pre-participation physical examinations are conducted by students' family physicians, this allows for continuity of care by someone who is familiar with the student and family. This also allows time for discussion of adolescent risk-taking issues. For students without access to their own health care providers, it is sometimes necessary to arrange for examination of students at health centres or through other school-based screening programmes.

Students who receive annual physical assessments by their primary health care providers may already have all the information necessary for the pre-participation physical examination.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SAFETY CURRICULUM

Staff, students and caregivers must be educated about the dangers of substance abuse, misconduct during physical activity, proper nutrition, extreme weight control practices (rapid weight gain or loss), and the importance of using safety gear as well as other aspects of safe participation in physical activities. Safety education must be a major component of the physical education programme.

Substance abuse and misconduct adversely affect safety during physical activity. Alcohol, other psychoactive drugs, and extreme weight control practices are examples of student indulgencies that can have long-term adverse consequences on the body.

The use of alcohol and other drugs increase the chances of injury through impaired judgement and delayed reaction time. Many performance-enhancing products and substances are readily available and are often legally purchased. Many of these substances may pose numerous or significant health hazards.

To correct erroneous associations between nutritional supplements and athletic accomplishment, teachers and coaches should emphasize that a nutritious diet of healthy foods also promotes muscle growth and optimal performance. Students should be encouraged to keep a record of their own practice, training, and performance improvement so that accomplishments in athletic endeavours are easily seen to be more closely associated with effort and practice, than being a 'magic' response to crash diet and stimulants.

Bullying, harassment, unsportsmanlike conduct and violent behaviour are hazardous to student and staff safety, and discourage many students from participating in physical activities. Teachers/Coaches should work with classroom teachers to educate students about acceptable behaviour in play areas. Teachers/Coaches should inform them of rules and the consequences of breaking these rules. Coaches, physical education teachers, and those supervising other physical activities must be trained to recognise and to educate students and caregivers about the importance of the signs and symptoms of injuries (including muscle, bone, head and abdominal injuries) and action should be taken when they occur. They should teach students the rationale and procedure for removing a student from a physical activity after an injury and for seeking medical assessment and assistance.

PROTECTIVE GEAR AND SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Physical education instructors, coaches and caregivers require the use of appropriate safety equipment and protective gear in physical education classes, interscholastic and intramural sports, and all other physical activity programs.

Minimising physical activity-related injuries and illnesses for students is a joint responsibility of teachers, supervisors of physical activity programs, coaches, students and families.

Safety gear should be sport-specific and strictly mandatory for the respective activity. Protective gear and safety equipment must be frequently inspected and replaced if worn, damaged, or outdated. Safety gear worn by students should fit properly. Protective gear should be worn during practice sessions as well as during competitions.

SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the guidelines detailed in this document:

- Trained, qualified Physical Education teachers and coaches must conduct physical activities.
- There must be mandatory insurance coverage for both teachers and students.
- Equipment must be in good condition and should be: age, ability and size appropriate with no sharp or dangerous edges.
- Equipment should be checked regularly before and after use and should be repaired/discarded as necessary.
- First-aid kits should be maintained and readily accessible.
- Medical personnel should be present during competitions.
- Licensed and insured vehicles must be available to transport injured participants for further treatment.
- Each institution should be affiliated to the hospital to which it is most closely located.
- Injured participants must be referred for further medical attention/follow-up treatment.
- Equipment must be properly maintained and stored.
- Teachers, administrators, children and parents should be aware of safety guidelines/risks involved in participation in sporting activities.
- Visual supervision, on-site supervision, and in-the-area supervision is mandatory during classes or sport competitions.
- Instructors, coaches and supervisors must abide by the recommended ratio of students to teachers.
- Safety gear and appropriate footwear must be worn for each activity.
- Safety checks should be done on facilities/playing areas, to isolate and identify potential hazards. (Children must be made aware of potential hazards.)
- Only materials that will not endanger children who suffer from severe allergies or disabilities should be used.

SUMMARY cont'd

- Throwing implements should be handled with care.
- Implements should not be used (by teacher or student) to strike a person.
- Administrators, teachers/coaches and parents should ensure that athletes are on an appropriate feeding programme.
- Athletes must be properly fed (given balanced meals) and hydrated before, during and after competitions.
- Teachers, coaches and parents/guardians should be aware of medical conditions affecting every athlete.

AWARDS

The focus of intramural programmes is participation. Modest recognition for participation may be appropriate. There should also be opportunity for recognition of excellence leading to representational participation at the intermural level.

EVALUATION

Intermural programmes must be subject to continuous, structured evaluation. Areas to be reviewed include:

- Objectives
- Programme Activities
- Facilities/equipment
- Level/frequency of participation
- Safety
- Organisation/administration
- Student response

The results of the evaluation allow for modification of objectives, planning and implementation of programme needs, justification for budgets, and programme improvement.

CONCLUSION

Regular physical activity, whether organised through direct class involvement or as part of a co-curricular programme, is essential for normal, healthy growth and development, emotional wellbeing and creative expression. Participation allows students to understand and make decisions regarding personal fitness as well as to recognise the value of physical activity to their daily lives. Regular evaluation helps to measure the extent to which students are benefiting from their involvement. These safety guidelines have been prepared to inform and to protect the rights, responsibilities and wellbeing of all stakeholders involved in the planning and execution of physical education classes and programmes. They may be instrumental in preventing or minimising injuries arising from unforeseen circumstances affecting students/athletes, and should therefore be carefully read, observed and applied.

