

HEALTH & FITNESS

Mouthguards Protect More than Just a Smile

BY DR. REGINALDA. GRIGGS

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By all means, suit up for all those spring and summer sports. But remember that suiting up includes precautions to protect your smile and your face.

In a split second, a ball or an elbow can slam into the mouth. Children are vulnerable. Between the ages of 5 and 14, they account for more than 80 percent of sports-related emergency room visits, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Parents need to pay as much attention to getting the proper protective gear as they do to the play-off prospects for “Junior’s” team.

This year, the American Association of Orthodontists commissioned a survey of parents to look into the issue of “preventable” face and mouth injuries. Sixty-seven percent of

parents surveyed said that their child does not wear a mouthguard. The parents reported that the most popular sports in which children use mouthguards were football (42 percent), ice hockey (32 percent) and martial arts (13 percent).

Mouthguards should be worn for contact sports such as soccer, wrestling, football, basketball, baseball, volleyball, lacrosse, field and ice hockey, and softball. These guards should be in place in any activity where the mouth might come in contact with the ground or a hard object.

If your child wears braces, your orthodontist can recommend the proper kind of mouthguard.

Mouthguards are a relatively inexpensive piece of protective equipment. They do more than protect the teeth. They can prevent a fractured jaw. They pro-



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tect against injuries to the neck and spine by muting the force transmitted through the jaw to the base of the skull.

Don’t neglect other forms of protection. Helmets save lives and prevent grievous head injuries. If they are required in some sports, there’s a good reason for that.

Precaution and common sense are the key to preventing injuries.

Dr. Griggs is the principal of Castro Valley-based Griggs Orthodontics and a partner in Creative Dimensions in Dentistry in San Leandro and Castro Valley. Visit www.griggsworthodontics.com or call 537-3050.