

CHEERLEADING

Cheerleading has become a "sport" of its own and some students are eager to participate in this activity and to press the limits of physical ability, as well as gravity in performing stunts.

Most cheerleading injuries happen during exercises like pyramids, tosses, and gymnastic moves. There have been many injuries resulting from cheerleading accidents including broken bones, sprains and strains, especially in the legs, ankles, and feet.

The incidence of concussions and closed head injuries and hospital admissions has gone up. Most concussions happen during practice. Almost half of the reported concussions happen when the cheerleader does not have a spotter.

Because skill level and physical ability varies dramatically by age, it is imperative that age-appropriate programs are implemented.

USA Cheer has given safety rules. A safe program has direct adult supervision, correct conditioning, skills training, and warm-up exercises. Coaches should be trained in risk management, as well as basic first aid and CPR/AED training. Concussion protocols should always be followed. Athletes, coaches, and parents should be trained in athlete protection. This includes understanding, preventing, recognizing, and reporting abuse such as bullying, hazing, physical and emotional misconduct, and sexual abuse.

These are some general guidelines for cheerleaders:

- Cheerleaders should have a health exam, including a complete health history.
- A qualified and knowledgeable coach must be on hand.
- Practice sessions should be supervised, and held in a safe and appropriate place.
- Individual and squad ability levels should be carefully evaluated. Only stunts that are right for those levels should be planned and done.
- Participants should have good training in tumbling.
- Mandatory professional training in correct spotting methods must be held.
- Participants should be part of a conditioning and strength-building program.
- No jewelry should be worn.
- Structured stretching exercises and flexibility and warm-up routines should be held before and after practice sessions, game activities, competitions, and pep rallies.
- Only the right surfaces should be used for tumbling, stunts, pyramids, and jumps.
- Cheerleaders' skills should be evaluated based on accepted teaching standards. Correct spotting should be used until all cheerleaders have mastered the skills.
- Hard and unbending supports or rough edges or surfaces must be correctly covered.
- Proper athletic clothing and shoes must be worn.
- Props, like signs, should be made of solid material with no sharp edges or corners.
- All signs should be gently tossed or kept under control.

Parents/guardians of students participating in cheerleading activities should have a sports participation form on file with the district. The form should include language regarding assumption of risk, and health insurance coverage.

Even when following the USA Cheer guidelines, there is still inherent risk involved in cheerleading activities. All cheerleading gymnastics, including tumbling should be carefully reviewed and supervised by a qualified adult advisor or coach. For additional information visit the USA Cheer website at usacheer.org.