

Preventing Injuries is Everyone's Responsibility

Gymnastics injuries can have various impacts on your business, ranging from costly medical expenses and liability claims that may increase insurance cost, downtime in a gymnast's training, and negative word-of-mouth advertising. Preventing injuries is everyone's responsibility.

The book *Epidemiology of Sports Injuries* recommends the following preventive measures:

- Educate gymnasts to detect the early signs of stress injury and to seek appropriate treatment and modification of training.
- Make sure gymnasts understand the importance of general fitness and warm-up procedures in relation to later performance and injury avoidance, along with the importance of proper nutrition.
- Allow gymnasts to voice concerns to their coach if they are performing skills beyond their current abilities. Avoid excessive pressure from coaches and parents.

Coaches play a critical role in the gymnastics environment. To prevent injuries, coaches should have the following minimum qualifications:

- Extensive knowledge of the sport, including injury prevention techniques, skills development, safety rules, and equipment maintenance.
- Certification from a recognized education program, such as the USAG Safety Education Course.
- Experience in managing parental expectations and behavior.

The gymnastics environment should promote safety and enforce the use of safety equipment at all times. Make everyone in your gymnastics operation responsible for safety, and hold them accountable for incidents that could have been avoided had established rules been followed.

A health support system should involve parents, coaches, gymnasts, and their physician. To protect both the gymnast's health and your business from liability, require each gymnast to complete a pre-participation physical exam. Complete an exam before a new gymnast enters your program, before any change in a gymnast's competitive level, and before a gymnast returns to practice following injury.

Document your overall injury prevention program and maintain it as part of your business records. Review your plan quarterly so everyone is aware of your expectations to keep injuries out of your gym.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.