

Do You Know Your Athletes' Medical Histories?

As a coach, it is important to know the medical and athletic background of your cheerleading or gymnastics athletes. Understanding a participant's physical capabilities and medical conditions is a good risk management approach for any coach who wants to minimize the risk of injury in their gym.

According to *Children and Injuries*, by Joe L. Frost, all coaches should be aware of nine potential risk factors related to young athletes:

1. Suitable physique for a specific sport
2. Problems with bone structure alignment
3. Lack of flexibility
4. Lack of muscularity or strength imbalance
5. Marginal or poor skill development
6. Behavioral factors, including risk taking, to cope with stress
7. Injury history, specifically inadequate rehabilitation from a prior injury
8. Adolescent growth spurts, such as individual differences in timing and tempo, reduction in flexibility, and adolescent awkwardness
9. Maturity mismatches in size and strength, and late maturation

Encourage participants to visit their doctor for a physical exam prior to starting the program. At a minimum, develop a set of questions you can ask parents when a child is enrolled in your program. Use these questions to highlight physical challenges of the activity and to seek information regarding any potential medical emergencies.