



PRESS RELEASE

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With an annual toll of over 320.000 injuries, handball is a highly demanding game for players as well as for coaches.

A European pilot study confirms that it is possible to anchor injury prevention more strongly into the education and training of coaches as well as players and thus to increase the health benefits of playing handball by decreasing injury risks.

Today, the report on the pilot was launched at the annual conference of the European Handball Federation and the Union of University Handball Teachers in Vienna, 18-19 November 2011.

Amsterdam, 18 November 2011 - It is estimated that each year at least 320,000 injuries occur in European handball. The total medical costs of handball related injuries are estimated at up to 400 million euro a year, half of these costs being related to knee injuries. It is evident that handball is a highly demanding type of sport and requires sufficient physical capacities as well as proper protective measures for players to be in place.

Quite some knowledge is available as to the appropriate training principles and protective measures, e.g. use of ankle braces, in order to reduce injury risks among handball players. However, the challenge is to enable clubs to invest means and capacity to implement such measures and to motivate coaches and athletes to bring these principles consistently into practice. Coaches play a decisive role in translating prevention evidence into practice and are the most important mediators for integrating safety aspects within current training and coaching practices.

European initiative

With this in mind, the Safety in Sports Network under the leadership of the Ruhr-University Bochum (GE), developed a set of tools and measures that is proven to be effective as well as ready for being taken up by the trainers, coaches and athletes. This has been done in collaboration with the Norwegian and Czech Handball Federation and the European Handball Federation.

Experts from the two national federations critically reviewed a set of recommended practices and assessed their applicability and acceptability at local level. Each of the two federations produced a 'tailor-made' set of tools, coaching clinics and training seminars.

Increased competencies of trainers and players

The results of these pilots are most promising:

- Coaches in the two countries became more competent in directing their training practices towards training contents that are more effective in reducing injuries, in particular by including muscle strengthening and co-ordination exercises;
- Coaches found better opportunities to motivate their team members in appreciating and accepting the training practices offered;

- The players that participated in the pilots appreciated the inclusion of safety aspects in sports practice while this also contributed to enhancing their performance.

Both federations are confident that the pilots has helped to anchor injury prevention more strongly into their education and training curricula, to decrease injury risks and to make handball an even more attractive type of sport.

Way ahead

The Safety in Sports Network will continue to promote safety in all types of sports and physical activities by initiating collaborative pilots and information campaigns. The pilot results are also of relevance for other ball-sports and team sports and will be therefore shared with other relevant stakeholders.

The Safety in Sports Network advises national handball federations to follow a pro-active strategy as to the risk of injury and communicate with their members openly about the injury risks involved and necessary measures to be taken by clubs and individuals. All sustained injuries should be reported to trainers and coaches and should be systematically recorded at club and national level, in order to identify individual and situational risk factors, to monitor injury trends and to evaluate effects of measures taken.

All national associations should include an injury prevention module in their trainer education curriculums and designate an official staff member as 'safety promotion ambassador' within their federation.

The European Handball Federation should play a key role in facilitating the transfer of the good practices developed by the Norwegian and Czech handball federations towards other countries in Europe.

Such a pro-active approach will contribute to the positive image of the game and the organisations involved, and will help to attract new members.

Note for press:

The Safety in Sports project, initiated by the Safety in Sports Network members KfV-Austria, RUB-Germany, EuroSafe-EU and CSI- the Netherlands and has been co-sponsored by the European Commission under the Public Health Programme 2003-2008 and by ARAG Sports Insurance Germany.

The research and piloting activities related to handball have been carried out in close collaboration with the European Handball Federation (EHF) which is the governing body for handball in Europe. Background reports are accessible on the web site www.safetyinsports.eu

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