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**UW study to be first to examine whether headgear can
reduce concussions in soccer players**

MADISON —When it comes to preventing concussions, researchers studying football and hockey get the majority of both media coverage and research dollars. But a new study by the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH) will examine the efficacy of using headgear for athletes in a relatively overlooked sport: high school soccer.

The study, funded by a \$300,000 grant from the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE), will be the first to provide rigorous, scientific evidence to guide clinical recommendations about the use of protective headgear to reduce sport-related concussions (SRC) in adolescent soccer players.

“Despite the high incidence of SRC in high-school soccer players, little is known about equipment that is being marketed to players and coaches that may positively or negatively influence a player’s risk of getting concussed,” said Tim McGuine, senior scientist in the department of orthopedics and rehabilitation at the UW SMPH. “Our goal is to determine whether or not there is a benefit to using headgear so that all stakeholders can make decisions, based on strong scientific evidence, about the safety of our kids.”

Researchers will enroll 3,000 male and female high-school soccer players (ages 14-18, grades 9-12) from 88 Wisconsin high schools. Enrollees will complete a baseline questionnaire to provide information about their age, competition level, number of years playing competitive soccer, and previous SRC history. Half of the schools will be assigned to the intervention group, which will require players to wear protective soccer headgear for all practice and competitions throughout their competitive season. Schools in the control group will be allowed to practice and compete without the protective gear.

Because football seems to get most of the attention, the risk of concussion in other collision/contact sports appears to be underappreciated, says Dr. Alison Brooks, assistant professor in the UW Department of Orthopedics and Rehabilitation, Division of Sports Medicine.

“The rate of concussion in girls’ high school soccer is 4th highest, behind only football, boys’ ice hockey and lacrosse, and high-school girls soccer players get concussed at almost twice the rate as their male counterparts,” Brooks says. “The reason for this increased risk in girls is not clearly understood. This study is incredibly important in helping us to learn more about concussion in a non-football sport, and to specifically look more closely at gender differences as well as monitor rates of other types of injuries that may be affected by use of the headgear.”

Researchers will sign up schools this spring and the study itself will start in August.

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