Many athletes focus on proper conditioning and training to avoid injuries, but not enough of them consider the importance of preventing skin cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, most of the more than 1 million cases of non-melanoma skin cancer diagnosed yearly in the United States are sun-related. Melanoma, the most serious type, will account for approximately 7,800 of the 10,600 deaths due to skin cancer each year.

Yet despite documented benefits, many athletes do not use sunscreen during outdoor practices or games. In one study of 139 athletes, 46 percent blamed lack of availability, and 33 percent thought they didn’t need it because of various misconceptions. Others said they didn’t consider the weather hot enough for sunburn.

Athletes who play in the daytime are exposed to a tremendous amount of Ultraviolet (UV) light. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends avoiding sun exposure from 11 am - 4 pm, precisely the time many teams are playing or practicing. Sweating makes the risk worse. Perspiration on the skin lowers the minimal erythema dose, the lowest UV exposure needed to turn the skin barely pink.

To lower your risk of skin cancer, try to follow these guidelines:

- Whenever possible, try to schedule games, practices or physical activity before 11 am or after 4 pm, when the sun’s rays are not as powerful.
- When taking a break, try to sit or stand in the shade. If the field has no shade, bring an umbrella or portable tent.
- Use sunscreen! At least 15-30 minutes before going outside, apply a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher.
- Reapply sunscreen to all exposed skin 15-30 minutes after sun exposure begins and then every two hours.
- Athletes should choose a waterproof or sweatproof sunscreen.
- For athletic attire, choose materials that are light and cool, such as cotton or lightweight synthetics. Shirts with collars can help protect your neck.

Coaches, especially, should encourage younger players to protect their skin. They can set an example by using sunscreen themselves at games and practices.
The AMITA Health Orthopedics Institute is a national leader in musculoskeletal care, offering comprehensive and advanced care for a wide range of conditions. We are proactive about keeping you active. That is why our multi-disciplinary orthopedic teams enlist a comprehensive leading edge approach to the prevention, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of musculoskeletal injuries.

Our team of highly-experienced board-certified physicians, surgeons, therapists and nurses are dedicated to providing patients of all ages with a personalized treatment program that is customized for your condition, lifestyle and personal preferences.

We work hard to prevent sports-related injuries, which have become increasingly more common among athletes, especially children. AMITA Health Sports Medicine Outreach Liaisons keep kids active and participating in the extracurricular activities they enjoy by delivering educational programs and support for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic care.

For more information, or to contact one of our Sports Medicine Outreach Liaisons, email us at SportsMedicine@amitahealth.org or call us at 847.385.7120 or 708.245.6051.