



Two Willow Street
Southborough, MA 01745-1027
800.342.8747 • Fax: 508.480.0002
massdental.org

October 15, 2019

The Honorable Joanne Comerford, Chair
The Honorable John Mahoney, Chair
Joint Committee on Public Health
State House Room 130
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Comerford and Chairman Mahoney:

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) represents approximately 80% of dentists in the Commonwealth through initiatives in education, advocacy, and promotion of the highest professional standards. As the leading authority on oral health care in the Commonwealth, we take great pride in championing oral health and lending the voice of dentistry to worthy initiatives that can make a difference in the lives of Bay State residents.

The MDS encourages the Committee to support **Senate Bill 1224, *An Act to Conduct a Comprehensive Study of Oral Injuries in School Sports***, which would authorize and direct the Department of Public Health (DPH) to conduct a comprehensive study of oral injuries in school sports in elementary, middle, and high school children. This legislation calls for the DPH to collect data on the types, frequency, and severity of oral injuries, including the identification of high-risk sports, and the long-term impact of oral health injuries on young athletes. The DPH would then develop strategic and legislative recommendations to reduce the incidence of oral injuries in school sports, including the mandatory use of protective mouth gear in all high-risk sports.

All sporting activities have an associated risk of orofacial injuries due to falls, collisions, contact with hard surfaces, and contact from sports-related equipment. The mouth and face of a child or young adult can be injured easily if the proper precautions are not taken while participating in sports or recreational activities. Although some sports-related injuries are unavoidable, many can be prevented. Helmets, facemasks, and mouthguards have been shown to reduce both the frequency and severity of dental and orofacial trauma.

Prevention is a hallmark of dentistry, and dentists play a key role in educating the public and our patients about the importance of protective equipment for the prevention of orofacial injuries. Mouthguards are an easy way to protect an athlete's smile from serious injury. The Grin and Wear It® campaign, presented by the MDS, the Massachusetts Medical Society, and the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, works to educate parents, coaches, and children on the importance of wearing mouthguards during contact sports. I invite you to learn more at massdental.org/mouthguards.

Consider the following:

- According to a study in *Pediatrics*, the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, 30% of children experience dental injury by age 14.
- Sports accidents account for 10-39% of all dental injuries in children, according to research published in the *International Journal of Paediatric Dentistry*.

- Athletes are 60 times more likely to suffer damage to the mouth when not wearing a mouthguard, according to the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation.
- The American Dental Association has estimated that face guards and mouthguards prevent approximately 200,000 injuries each year in high school and college football alone.
- A mouthguard is one of the most inexpensive pieces of protective gear available to young athletes, especially when compared to the high cost of restoring and treating a knocked-out or broken tooth, which can range from \$5,000 to \$20,000 over the course of a lifetime.

The consequences of orofacial injuries for children and their families are substantial due to the potential for pain, social and psychological effects, and economic implications. In addition to the immediate and long-term costs of treating orofacial trauma, these injuries also can have indirect costs, including children's lost hours from school and parents' lost hours from work—consequences that disproportionately burden lower-income, minority, and non-insured children.

Safe participation should be the goal of any sports program. By seeking to reduce oral injuries among student athletes, this legislation seeks to accomplish this goal. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation and for thinking of the oral health and well-being of our children in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janis B. Moriarty
President
Massachusetts Dental Society