

HEADGUARD USE IN COMBAT SPORTS: POSITION STATEMENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF RINGSIDE PHYSICIANS

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Headguard use is appropriate during some combat sports activities where the risks of injury to the face and ears are elevated. Headguards are highly effective in reducing the incidence of facial lacerations in studies of amateur boxers and are just as effective in other striking sports. They should be used in scenarios—especially sparring prior to competitions—where avoidance of laceration and subsequent exposure to potential blood-borne pathogens is important. Headguards are appropriate where avoidance of auricular injury is deemed important; limited data show a marked reduction in incidence of auricular injury in wrestlers wearing headguards.

Headguards should not be relied upon to reduce the risk of concussion or other traumatic brain injury. They have not been shown to prevent these types of injuries in combat sports or other sports, and human studies on the effect of headguards on concussive injury are lacking. While biomechanical studies suggest they reduce linear and rotational acceleration of the cranium, changes in athlete behavior to more risk-taking when wearing headguards may offset any risk reduction. In the absence of high-quality studies on headguard use, the Association of Ringside Physicians rec-

ommends that further research be conducted to clarify the role of headguards in all combat sports, at all ages of participation. Furthermore, in the absence of data on gender differences, policies should be standardized for men and women.

Development of this Position Statement

The ARP is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to the health and safety of athletes in combat sports. This position statement expresses a collaborative effort among the authors, subject matter experts, ARP Board of Directors, and Emeritus Board. An extensive literature search including, but not restricted to, MEDLINE, Cochrane Review, and non-indexed, peer-reviewed scientific articles published in online medical journals was performed using search terms of boxing, mixed martial arts, judo, taekwondo, wrestling, karate, combat sports, headguard, headgear, head injury, concussion, facial injury, craniofacial injury, and closed head injury.

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