



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Is there a governing body for cheerleading?

[USA Cheer](#) represents all forms of cheerleading in the United States and advocates for all cheerleaders – school, college, and all star (non school, club cheerleading) – to receive the tools they need to succeed, including proper equipment, trained instructors and medical resources.

How has the increase in participation changed cheerleading?

Cheerleading has seen a dramatic increase in participation across the US. According to numbers from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), competitive cheerleading has increased 46 per cent. With an estimated half million high school cheerleaders and the growing popularity of all star cheerleading, which adds nearly another half million, this increase in participation is a main factor in previous misconceptions that cheerleading has somehow gotten more dangerous.

Has anything been done to make cheerleading safer?

Cheerleading safety organizations are constantly focused on safety improvements. For example, when data showed that head injury rates were increasing for high school cheerleading, the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA) and National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) removed double twisting dismounts, further reducing the risk of catastrophic injury.

Cheer regulations are the result of coordinated efforts by organizations across the country that regulate cheerleading on all levels to ensure it is practiced and performed safely in gyms, high schools and colleges throughout the country. Here are some helpful details to keep in mind:

- The NCAA and college conferences requires that **college** cheerleading programs follow [AACCA](#) rules at their events, which restrict what skills can be performed. The NCAA requires that cheer programs are under the direct supervision of someone who has completed a national cheerleading safety course.
- **High school** cheer programs are governed by their state associations, just like football, volleyball and other sports and follow the [AACCA or NFHS rules](#). In fact, more spirit coaches than any other coaches have taken the AACCA Certification Course on [NFHS.org](#). Nearly 5,000 coaches took the course in 2015, a higher amount than other sports. Currently, there are 20,000 coaches that have completed the AACCA Risk Management course and are in good standing.
- **All Star cheerleading** (non-school) is governed by the [US All Star Federation](#), which has a coaches credentialing program and varying competition levels to provide a progressive safety environment.

Are 2/3 of catastrophic injuries in high school athletics from cheerleading, and is it more dangerous than football?

Not even close. This idea has been debunked time and time again. In fact, football has more than 2/3 of all catastrophic injuries in high school sports. In order to use the “2/3” figure, one has to ignore all male sports. Over the entire course of the study, dating back to 1982, cheerleading had 5% of total

catastrophic injuries ([Chart 1](#)). It's also worth noting that over the past ten years the number of catastrophic injuries has plummeted, thanks to changes in safety rules and safety education programs ([Chart 2](#)).

However, using total injury figures creates a misleading picture that doesn't account for the number of participants or length of season. When factoring in the number of cheerleaders and the length of time they participate, cheerleading is approximately 11th on the list of catastrophic injuries per 100,000 athletes ([Chart 3](#)).

These estimates for injury are supported by other studies that use exposure data to assess risk, including multiple concussion studies and the National High School Sports-Related Injury Surveillance Study.

If cheerleading was a sport, would it be safer?

There are at least 15 states that classify cheerleading as a sport and there is no evidence that this designation has made any difference in injury rates.

How do cheerleading injuries compare to other sports?

According to current [research](#), cheerleading has the 5th lowest rate of injuries compared 21 other sports. The only sports with a lower rate of injury were boys cross country, track, and boys and girls swimming/diving. Emergency room visits for cheerleading are lower than girls' basketball, soccer and softball. Of these visits, 98% are treated and released.

Have catastrophic injuries become more common as skill levels have increased?

Cheerleading has actually seen a dramatic reduction in catastrophic injuries since new regulations were instituted ten years ago. Those regulations included surface restrictions, prohibiting certain skills like double downs, and requiring additional spotters.

Are concussions an issue for cheerleaders?

The average concussion rate for all high school sports is 3.8 per 10,000 athlete exposures; the concussion rates for cheerleading is 43% less at a rate of 2.2 per 10,000 athlete exposures.

What can parents do if their kids want to try out for a cheerleading team?

Parents should start by finding out all they can about the cheerleading program and who will be coaching here are some questions they can start with:

- Is the coach certified through the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators and has the school conducted the appropriate background checks?
- Does the coach adhere to AACCA practice and performance guidelines?
- Does the coach ensure that performance skills are taught in the proper sequence using skills progression training, with an emphasis on training all squad members in proper spotting methods?
- Does the coach properly balance practice time between athletic training and spirit leadership instruction?
- Does the squad have an emergency plan in place?