



USA FOOTBALL'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUTH PLAY

The following recommendations were developed in collaboration with USA Football's Task Force on Athlete Health and Wellness, a subgroup of its [EDM Council](#). These eight recommendations are aligned with USA Football's [Football Development Model](#) (FDM), designed to develop the whole athlete based on a child's stage of development in alignment with the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee's American Development Model.

The Task Force on Athlete Health and Wellness is comprised of leaders across football, sport science, medicine and long-term athlete development. The recommendations provided in this document are based on published best practices and research currently available; it should be noted however, that in the absence of specific evidence, expert opinion is utilized.

RECOMMENDATION 1

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR SPORT-SPECIFIC FOOTBALL TRAINING BY AGE-BAND

AGE	PRACTICE LENGTH (MINUTES)	PRACTICES PER WEEK
Age 5+	30-60 min	1-2 practice(s)
Age 8+	60-90 min	1-3 practice(s)
Age 10+	75-105 min	2-3 practices
Age 12 thru Pre-HS	90-120 min	2-3 practices

RATIONALE

These guidelines are intended to provide a framework for league administrators, coaches and parents when planning training, competition schedules and practice plans. In alignment with the philosophy of the Football Development Model, these guidelines provide a clear and gradual progression relative to both the frequency and duration of practices as a young athlete grows and develops.

Training load should be age-appropriate and any increase in training load should be done carefully and in small increments. USA Football recognizes that these are general guidelines and the actual workload young athletes can handle will depend on many factors including and most importantly their individual developmental maturity.

These guidelines fall within the recommendations based on current research regarding athlete workload, including those established by the National Athletic Trainers' Association. **Note: This chart is strictly concerned with the frequency and duration of practice as it relates to age. Time limits on contact are addressed within other recommendations.**

RECOMMENDATION 2

RECOMMENDATION TO PROHIBIT CERTAIN DRILLS

In an effort to reduce head impact exposure, it is recommended that leagues prohibit the use of the following player-to-player contact drills:

- Board Drill // OL vs DL In-Line Run Blocking
 - Where there is no option for run, pass or play going right or left
- Bull in the Ring // King of the Circle
- Oklahoma Drill
- Pods // 3-Spot Without Run/Pass Read

RATIONALE

Research has shown that when consistent and specific efforts are made within a practice setting to reduce head impact and mitigate injury risk, positive outcomes can be attained. USA Football seeks a reduction in incidence of injury by removing high-risk drills which have limited transfer to skill development. By providing guidance to leagues and coaches in this area, USA Football can help identify and **prohibit** drills that:

- Only promote or teach contact “down the middle” of an opponent with no intent to offset the contact point.
- Do not allow for players to win with speed or angles, but only through physical contact or collision.
- Game- or Pod-based drills that require no game-specific reaction such as a designated ball insertion point for the offense, a run/pass option or designating a specific gap to control for the defense.
- Any full-contact drills that allow for greater than a 2:1 player-to-player ratio.
- Drills that include any of the essential elements listed in the above definitions.

RECOMMENDATION 3

RECOMMENDATION ON THE TWO-POINT STANCE

For youth football programs playing **any** version of non-contact, as well as limited contact and/or modified tackle game-types (i.e., Rookie Tackle), it is recommended that all players initiate movement from the two-point stance.

RATIONALE

Research has shown that players starting from a three- or four-point stance typically experience a greater number of repetitive head impacts. It is also important to note that developing athletes are still acquiring the strength, coordination and technical skills needed to perform specific movements, including proper head positioning. The entirety of USA Football’s blocking and block-defeat techniques can be taught, learned and effectively applied with a player starting from a two-point stance.

This will allow movement instruction, including blocking and block-defeat skills, to be taught and learned in a progressive manner that reduces the incidence of repetitive head impact for players in both practice and competition settings. It will prepare players, who may be asked to utilize a three- or four-point stance later in their football journey, how to properly initiate movement that removes the head as the initial point of contact.

RECOMMENDATION 4

AT THE YOUTH SENIOR TACKLE LEVEL, USA FOOTBALL ENCOURAGES THE USE OF THE TWO-POINT STANCE FOR OFFENSIVE PLAYERS

For youth tackle football played at the Senior level, programs are encouraged to instruct and use the two-point stance for players on the offensive side of the line of scrimmage.

RECOMMENDATION 4 (CONTINUED)

RATIONALE

Research has shown that players initiating movement from a three- or four-point stance, on or near the line of scrimmage, typically experience a greater number of repetitive head impacts than other position players. It is also important to note that developing athletes are still acquiring the strength, coordination and technical skills needed to perform specific movements, including head positioning. The entirety of USA Football's blocking techniques can be taught, learned and effectively applied with a player starting from a two-point stance on or near the line of scrimmage.

This will allow blocking and initial movement to be taught and learned in a manner that reduces the incidence of repetitive head impact both in practice and competition settings. When combined with proper technique, it will prepare players who may be asked to utilize a three- or four-point stance later in their football journey, how to properly initiate movement that removes the head as the initial point of contact.

RECOMMENDATION 5

RECOMMENDATION TO LIMIT FULL-CONTACT ACTIVITIES ON CONSECUTIVE DAYS

It is recommended that practices involving drills or activities considered to be **full-contact** are not allowed on consecutive days. This includes the day following a game or live-action scrimmage.

RATIONALE

This recommendation aligns with rules and recommendations made at both the NFHS and NCAA levels. Consideration also was given to current research on periodization training and indications that having a specified time frame allows for soft tissue to heal.

RECOMMENDATION 6

RECOMMENDATION FOR MAXIMUM GAMES PER WEEK (CONTACT)

No more than one full-contact game or live-action scrimmage is recommended per week. In post-season, a minimum of three days should lapse between full-contact games.

RATIONALE

To provide guidelines for coaches, parents, administrators and leagues to consider how many competitions and/or total football exposures are advised for a developing athlete per week. The recommendation is an effort to promote the health and wellness of every athlete regarding the physical and cognitive demands being placed on them.

RECOMMENDATION 7

RECOMMENDATION FOR PRESEASON PRACTICE CONTACT GUIDELINES

Following the acclimatization period, during the preseason (prior to competitions starting), it is recommended that coaches limit the amount of **full-contact** to no more than 75 minutes per week with no more than 30 minutes on any one day. Full-contact is defined as any drill or activity in which contact occurs at a competitive speed. Full-contact drills and activities are based on the initial player-to-player contact, regardless of whether the player goes to ground or not.

RATIONALE

USA Football was the first national youth football organization to provide endorsed contact guidelines for youth tackle football in 2015. Those guidelines earned the endorsements of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine (AMSSM) and the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA). To build on those guidelines, strides have been made in technique and training, as well as new data that suggests we reexamine the amount of full-contact advised in the youth football space. USA Football's updated guidelines (2021) incorporate these advancements and are recommended for **all** contact game-types.

RECOMMENDATION 8

RECOMMENDATION FOR REGULAR SEASON PRACTICE CONTACT GUIDELINES

Following the preseason period, once regular season competitions begin, it is recommended that coaches limit the amount of **full-contact** to no more than 60 minutes per week with no more than 30 minutes on any one day. Full-contact is defined as any drill or activity in which contact occurs at a competitive speed. Full-contact drills and activities are based on the initial player-to-player contact, regardless of whether the player goes to the ground or not.

RATIONALE

USA Football was the first national youth football organization to provide endorsed contact guidelines for youth tackle football in 2015. Those guidelines earned the endorsements of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine (AMSSM) and the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA). To build on those guidelines, strides have been made in technique and training, as well as new data that suggests we reexamine the amount of full-contact advised in the youth football space. USA Football's updated guidelines (2021) incorporate these advancements and are recommended for **all** contact game-types.

LEVELS OF CONTACT & PRACTICE GUIDELINES

These recommendations are best used with USA Football's Levels of Contact and Youth Practice Guidelines, both updated in 2021.

Learn more at usafootball.com/levels-of-contact or usafootball.com/guidelines.