



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



ADULT & YOUTH BASEBALL & SOFTBALL LEAGUES BEST PRACTICES

Youth and adult softball and baseball leagues that take place on fields owned by local entities provide an excellent opportunity for adults and children to participate in team activities, learn the games, and develop their skills. However, it is important to remember that local governments share an important responsibility for ensuring that the experience is a safe one for both the adults and children who choose to participate. Recent experience has shown that establishing rules and regulations for the use of locally owned fields by organized leagues is an excellent way to maintain and promote safe participation as a priority primarily while, at the same time, protecting local governments.

It is critically important to remember that a child's age does not equate to ability, and that regardless of age, not all children will share the same skill level. For that reason, it is imperative that local governments take the necessary precautions to protect children in programs they sponsor that take place in their facilities.

The Safety Director's office has formulated the following best practices for local officials to consider incorporating into annual use agreements, which shall be required for leagues to use fields and facilities. The NJ MEL Fund Attorney's Office is drafting a Model Facility Use Agreement and it will be posted on the NJ MEL website once it is finished. Please make certain that you work with your local municipal attorney in drafting agreements to include all provisions necessary to protect your local governmental entity.

1. Coaches at all levels shall inspect the playing field before each game or practice to identify and rectify any unsafe conditions, including holes in the infield or outfield, large stones, wet conditions from rain or sprinkler systems, or other conditions that may cause injuries to players. Any major unsafe condition shall be reported to the local municipality as soon as possible.
 - a. Additionally, it is highly recommended that **local officials** establish an ongoing inspection program for all athletic fields and facilities in order to reduce the likelihood of injuries caused by unforeseen field conditions. The [Recreation Department Facility Hazard Identification Inspection Form](#) can be modified or customized for your own use.
 - b. For local facilities that incorporate artificial turf, local officials shall establish regulations for use of those facilities that incorporate required sport-specific turf footwear for the safety of the participants and care of the fields. Artificial turf naturally dries faster and is engineered for enhanced surface traction. For that reason, sharp cleats are not necessary, and sharper and longer cleats will damage the integrity of the synthetic turf, and shorten the useful life of the fields.
2. Adult supervision must be present for all practices and games. Coaches shall be required to complete the [Rutgers SAFETY Clinic Course \(3 Hours\)](#), or equivalent (See the link below).
 - a. Background checks shall be performed on ALL coaches and assistants, with no exceptions. The [MSI Safety Director Bulletin: Youth Coaches Best Practice](#) will provide guidance.
3. It is essential that coaches emphasize how to play the game safely and correctly and ensure that children are grouped based on skill level, maturity, and physical characteristics.
 - a. To minimize injuries, coaches shall teach their players proper stretching techniques and include proper stretching before play or practice begins.

4. Children shall use proper safety gear **when practicing and playing games**, including the following:
 - a. Batting helmets whenever a player is at bat, waiting to bat, running the bases, or helping coaches at first or third base. Helmets shall cover both ears and have an approved face guard attached that fits comfortably. If the helmet has a chin strap, it shall be fastened securely to avoid falling off while the player is running.
 - i. Batting gloves are also recommended to help protect the player's hands while batting and running the bases.
 - b. For reasons of player safety, it is essential that children shall not permitted to swing bats either in the dugout or in the on deck circle.
 - c. Catchers shall wear the following equipment:
 - i. Catcher's helmets with full face masks
 - ii. Throat guards.
 - iii. Full-length chest protectors
 - iv. Shin guards
 - v. Cup protection for boys.
 - d. Infielders shall be required to wear face masks, regardless of whether it is a recreational league or travel league.
 - e. Pitchers, regardless of whether the league utilizes fast pitch, slow pitch, or arc pitch, shall wear face masks and heart guards. Pitchers have less than a second to react in many cases, and it is critical that they wear both face masks and heart guards to reduce the frequency and severity of injuries.
 - i. Similarly, coaches who are pitching to players in a game or practice shall be required to wear face masks or use a pitching screen that protects the coach for the same reasons.
 - f. It is recommended that children be required to wear long pants to avoid injuries while practicing and playing, and it is also recommended that players wear sliding pants to protect themselves.
 - i. If required by the league, softball cleats shall be **molded plastic cleats, and not metal cleats**.
5. It is strongly recommended that the youth recreational (i.e., not travel) leagues **permit only non-composite bats** to be used. The use of composite bats significantly increases the safety risk for players based on the batted ball speed from composite bats.
 - a. For travel leagues, it is recommended that the [USABat Standard](#), as adopted by Little League Baseball, or other nationally recognized standard for youth sports, be followed.
6. In determining the distances between bases and from the pitcher's mound to home plate, leagues must consider **the age and ability level of the players**. The recommended distances can be found in the [Little League Baseball Field Specifications](#) and the [USA Softball Official Rules](#).
7. The following are recommended "Best Practices" for adult softball and baseball programs and leagues. **Municipal entities shall strongly consider imposing these rules in exchange for permitting adult leagues to utilize fields for games, leagues, and nonprofit recreational events.**
 - a. Face masks are highly recommended for anyone playing a position in the infield, including pitchers.

- b. Catchers shall wear proper protective equipment regardless of whether the league utilizes fast pitch, slow pitch, or arc pitch, for reasons of personal safety. At a minimum, catchers shall be required to wear a mask with a throat guard and a chest protector.
 - c. Regardless of whether the league utilizes fast pitch, slow pitch, or arc pitch, for reasons of personal safety, a pitching screen shall be used for games and during batting practice.
 - d. The distance between the pitcher's mound and Homeplate shall be adjusted based on the skill level of the players in the league.
 - e. To minimize injuries, all players shall stretch before play or practice begins.
 - f. Organized leagues shall utilize a trained umpire for games to avoid conflicts in the field.
 - g. If required by the league, for reasons of personal safety, softball cleats made of molded plastic cleats, shall be considered as opposed to metal cleats.
 - h. Adult leagues shall consider the skill level of play in determining whether or not composite bats will be permitted, as the use of composite bats significantly increases the safety risk for players based on the batted ball speed from those bats. If composite bats are permitted to be used, the standard developed by Little League baseball for softball bats, the [USABat Standard](#), or another nationally recognized standard for youth sports, as shown below, shall be followed. **Bats that have been "modified" in any way shall not be permitted to be utilized for reasons of player safety.**
8. We have provided links to additional resources including [MSI Bulletins](#) and [MSI Model Policies](#) that may be helpful to you on this and other related topics:
- **MSI Safety Director Bulletins**
 - [AED Programs](#)
 - [Batting Cages Best Practices](#)
 - [Bleacher and Grandstand Best Practices](#)
 - [Fencing for Parks Best Practices](#)
 - [Lightning PEOSH Safety & Health Alert #38](#)
 - [Lightning Safety Best Practices](#)
 - [Utility Cart Best Practices](#)
 - [Youth Coach Best Practices](#)
 - **MSI Model Policies**
 - [AED Program](#)
 - [Exposure Control Plan \(BBP\)](#)
 - [Utility Carts Safety Program](#)
 - [Lightning Awareness Safety Program](#)

The Safety Director's office is ready to assist if additional information or guidance is needed. Please feel free to reach out at your convenience or discuss your concerns with the risk control consultant assigned to your local government.