



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



FLAG FOOTBALL PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES

Recreation Departments considering a flag football program should evaluate applicable legal, regulatory, operational, and safety requirements before launch. Although flag football is generally considered lower contact than tackle football, it still presents meaningful injury, supervision, and liability exposures. These risks are best addressed through written policies, staff training, documented inspections, emergency planning, and appropriate insurance and contractual protections.

Before launching a program, the department should develop a written policy and procedure manual. Key considerations should include age divisions, eligibility standards, and whether divisions will be co-ed or single gender. Refer to a recognized flag football association, such as [NFL Flag NJ](#), and create a written rules manual that identifies prohibited conduct, such as tackling, dangerous contact, unnecessary roughness, and unsafe flag-pulling techniques.

Departments should confirm all applicable legal and administrative requirements are addressed. Youth sports policies should include requirements related to:

- Concussion and injury education, removal from play, and return-to-play clearance
- Coach background checks, abuse prevention training, and mandatory reporting obligations
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) considerations and reasonable accommodations
- Create venue-specific emergency action plans for each site

A complete registration package is an important risk management tool. Consider including the following documents:

- Participant waiver and assumption of risk form
- Parental consent, medical authorization, and emergency contact forms, with a concussion acknowledgment.
- Code of conduct acknowledgment

Outdoor sports programs require strong environmental controls. Heat-related precautions should include monitoring the heat index, ensuring that water and rest breaks are available, and setting clear thresholds for modifying or canceling activities. League organizers should also consider acclimatization at the start of the season.

Severe weather, other than heat, must also be considered. Monitor for lightning and severe wind events. Establish written suspension and evacuation criteria and create a communication plan for delays and cancellations.

Decide on a schedule of field inspections and maintenance. What will the recreation department or public works be responsible for and at what frequency? And what will the coaches be responsible for before each game? Written forms, logs, and checklists are strongly encouraged.

Although flag football generally uses less protective equipment than tackle football, the condition of that equipment remains important. Flag belts should fit properly and release as intended. Uniform policies should address unsafe items such as exposed jewelry, casts or braces, and possibly prohibited cleats. Mouthguards should be required.

Inadequate supervision is a common factor with injuries and liability claims. Establish coach and official qualifications. Provide and document training for coaches and officials. Written lesson plans are the best practice for ensuring consistency across training and for recording updates when warranted.

Additional risk arises if the sponsoring agency provides, arranges, or permits transportation to out-of-town games. If so, will participants be transported by municipal vehicles, third-party providers, or parents or guardians only? If transportation will be provided by the agency, who will be responsible for supervision before player pickup and after drop-off? Informal transportation by coaches or volunteers should be prohibited.

Adopt and publish a zero-tolerance policy for improper spectator conduct, and train staff to enforce it consistently.

Flag football programs should be established only after reviewing applicable state law, local ordinances, participant safety procedures, coach screening standards, emergency response plans, and insurance considerations. The local attorney should review all forms, contracts, and policies.