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Youth Throwers

As we approach the spring and summer baseball seasons it is important we address the needs of young pitchers and their arms. With the introduction of year-round youth baseball the number of pitching related injuries and surgeries has increased. Although these injuries become evident in high school and college they often can be traced back to the youth leagues. The biggest risk factor appears to be arm fatigue. Pitchers who frequently pitch with arm fatigue are more likely to develop future injuries. Parents and coaches need to be vigilant and listen to young pitchers when they complain of arm fatigue or pain. While upper extremity muscular soreness is a normal part of a pitchers development, joint pain is not, and it is believed to be a warning sign of developing overuse injury.

Recent studies have identified a significant association between increased risk of injury and high daily pitch counts, high cumulative year pitch counts, as well as breaking pitches (curveball, slider). Based on these studies, the USA Baseball Medical & Safety Advisory Committee has developed guidelines for youth pitchers.

Rest days needed following number of pitches thrown												
Age \ Pitches	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	70	80	90
8-10	1	1	1	2	2	3	4	X	X	X	X	X
11-12	0	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	4	X	X	X
13-14	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	X	X
15-16	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	4
17-18	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4

Maximum number of pitches per game and per wk		
Age	Maximum pitches/game	Maximum games/week
8-10	50	2
11-12	65	2
13-14	75	2
15-16	90	2
17-18	105	2

Minimum age to start throwing various pitches	
Pitch Type	Age
Fastball	8
Change-up	10
Curveball	14
Knuckleball	15
Slider	16-18
Forkball	16-18
Splitter	16-18
Screwball	17-18

In addition to the above guidelines, the Committee made the following general recommendations for youth pitchers:

1. Do not throw breaking pitches (curveballs, sliders) until puberty (about age 13). Instead, a youth pitcher should focus on a fastball and change-up, and also pitch control.
2. Proper pitching mechanics are important as early as possible in the development of the pitcher. Year-round physical conditioning should be employed as the body develops.
3. Pitchers are discouraged from pitching for more than one team in a season.
4. For at least three months a year, a pitcher should not play any baseball or perform throwing drills. In addition, any overhead activity (football quarterback, competitive swimming, javelin throwing) should be avoided during that period of time.
5. A pitcher should not return to the pitching mound in a game after being removed. Additionally, pitching practice after a pitched game is to be avoided.