



# U.S. Soccer Federation Youth Soccer Heat Stress Guidelines

## Quick Tips for Parents, Coaches and Young Athletes

Youth soccer participation is at an all-time high, with nearly 14 million young athletes under the age of 18 playing soccer at elite and recreational levels in the United States<sup>1</sup>. To alert parents, coaches and young athletes about the dangers of dehydration and help prevent heat illness among young athletes, the U.S. Soccer Federation offers the following recommendations to parents, coaches and young soccer players.

It is important these groups follow these recommendations in light of recent heat illness incidents across a variety of sports and because children are more susceptible to heat illness than adults when active in hot, humid conditions.

### G.O.A.L.

To help make the recommendations easy to remember, the U.S. Soccer Federation has developed the acronym G.O.A.L., which stands for:

- **Get acclimated** – bodies need time to gradually adapt to increased exposure to high temperatures and humidity (especially young athletes).
- **On schedule drinking**– Youth athletes should be encouraged to drink on a schedule before they become thirsty, and should drink before, during and after practice and games.
- **Always bring a sports drink**– replacing electrolytes and providing energy is crucial to keeping kids safe and performing at their best.
- **Learn the signs** – if someone becomes unusually fatigued, dizzy, and nauseous or has a headache during exercise in the heat, have them stop, rest and drink fluids.

## YOUTH FLUID GUIDELINES

### Before Activity

- Young players should be well hydrated.
  - ✓ You can insure young athletes are properly hydrated by checking the color of their urine. Dark, apple-juice like urine indicates that you need more fluid, whereas light, lemonade-like urine indicates good hydration status.

### During Activity

- Drink early – even slight dehydration can compromise performance and increase the risk for heat-related illnesses.
- Young players should consume 5 to 9 ounces of fluid every 20 minutes while active.
- Sports drinks like Gatorade are preferred to water because research shows a young athlete will drink 90% more and stay better hydrated.
- Fluids with salt (sodium chloride), such as sports drinks, are also beneficial because they increase thirst and maintain voluntary fluid intake and help replace sodium lost through sweat.
- Keeping beverages cool at temperatures of 50 to 59 degrees is recommended.

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<sup>1</sup> Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association

### **Fluids to Avoid During Practice or Games**

- During active occasions, carbonated beverages, such as soft drinks, can reduce voluntary drinking due to stomach fullness and throat burn when gulping.
- Caffeinated beverages have a mild diuretic effect and therefore could promote dehydration by increasing urine production during active occasions.
- Energy drinks should be avoided because many contain caffeine and have a high carbohydrate concentration, which slows fluid absorption.
- Fruit juices can slow fluid absorption and cause upset stomach during activity.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCCER SAFETY IN THE HEAT**

### **Acclimation is the Key**

Help young players adjust to high temperatures and humidity by taking steps to acclimate them to the heat. Young athletes should have around 8 to 10 short exposures to the hotter conditions (at 45 to 60 minutes each) to acclimate sufficiently.

### **Avoid Unusually Hot Temperatures**

If confronted with extreme temperature and humidity conditions, it's important to hold practices and games at cooler times in the day such as morning or dusk.

### **Make Fluids Part of the Game Plan**

Before, during and after practice and games, be sure young athletes consume adequate amounts of fluid. Research shows a 6% carbohydrate sports drink, like Gatorade, can be absorbed as rapidly as water and can provide energy to help delay fatigue and improve performance.

### **Clothes Should be Cool**

Children should wear clothing that is light-colored, lightweight and loose-fitting to keep cool.

### **Use the Shade**

Parents and coaches should encourage young players to take breaks in shaded areas whenever possible especially during tournaments, multi-game and multi-practice days.

### **Know the Warning Signs of Dehydration**

Dehydration during activity is a common problem and can place young athletes at risk for serious heat-related illness, such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. That's why it's important to know the warning signs:

- Noticeable Thirst
- Decreased performance
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Nausea
- Headache
- Muscle cramping
- Dark yellow urine (or no desire to urinate)
- Lightheaded feeling or dizziness
- Difficulty paying attention

If a young player becomes disoriented or unconscious, seek medical attention immediately.

### **Be Prepared for an Emergency**

Always have a phone available and be familiar with emergency numbers. Keep ice and iced towels on hand in case of heat-related emergencies.