

While weight training activities may seem relatively benign compared to contact sports, appearances can be deceiving. Improper technique and peer pressure to lift heavier causes injuries including: lower back strain, rotator cuff tears, shoulder damage, and crushed fingers or toes. While some of these injuries may not be entirely preventable, they can be reduced through proper instruction, good supervision, and regular equipment maintenance. Please consider incorporating these measures into your program to protect yourself, the program, and the school district.

Supervision

Improper supervision is undoubtedly the most common allegation against school districts when injuries occur. Some supervision recommendations are:

- Be physically present. If you are not in the room, you are not supervising.
- Reinforce good behaviors and correct inappropriate activities. Document and track the progress of students.
- Provide closer supervision for potentially more hazardous activities, such as using free weights.
- Give special attention to maximum lift attempts.
- Incorporate the buddy system for all free-weight activities. Match the strength of partners evenly to ensure that each can spot the other safely. Use additional spotters if the lifted weight cannot be safely controlled from the single spotter position.
- Supervise the weight machines as closely as the free weights. Even though weight machines are generally considered safer than free weights, students may get overconfident and use unsafe techniques or too much weight.
- Warn students to avoid moving weight stacks and other machine parts when a machine is in use. Make sure no one uses a machine while another person changes its weights.
- Provide supervision and enforce the same rules and training requirements during open gym.
- Instructors must be certified in first aid and CPR. Provide training in bloodborne pathogens to staff and students.
- Document all injuries and emergency care and maintain the reports on file for further review.
- Control access to the weight room. Lock the weight room at all times when the instructor is not present.

Equipment and Facilities

Defending a school district with no documented equipment maintenance program is very difficult, if not impossible. Reduce potential loss exposure by following these recommendations:

- Conduct regular facility inspections and document the inspection for permanent records. Please find a sample weight room checklist at the end of this article.
- Conduct regular equipment inspections and document the inspections for permanent records.
- Immediately remove defective equipment from use.
- Perform periodic maintenance such as lubrication of parts or parts replacement as the manufacturer recommends.
- Have equipment assembled, serviced, and repaired by the manufacturer or authorized personnel.
- Do not modify equipment without the manufacturer's approval, as it will void the warranty and potentially put the burden of product liability on the school district.
- Clean and sanitize equipment to prevent the spread of diseases.
- Adhere to maximum room occupancy requirements.

- Leave enough room between pieces of equipment for the safe execution of all activities. Establish and mark a safety zone around each machine or training station.

Instruction & Rules

Some claims and suits have alleged that the injured student did not receive proper instruction on safe weight training techniques. Some recommendations concerning instruction are:

- Use only qualified instructors to teach weight training. It is a highly specialized area of physical fitness. Safe lifting technique forms the basis of an effective weight-training program.
- Have parents/guardians sign an informed consent form before their student participates in the exercise room. Involve and inform parents so that they are aware of your actions to ensure their child's safety and development.
- Establish a code of safe behavior. Post written rules and document them in a handbook. Discuss the information regularly and enforce the rules consistently.
- Communicate training to students through both lectures and demonstrations.
- Do not assume that they are proficient in basic activities because a student appears athletic.
- Instruct students on the basics, including warming up before the workout, stretching, cooling down, and proper breathing.
- Instruct students on the hazards and consequences of improper lifting techniques and improper use of equipment and spotters. Document this in the lesson plan.
- Instruct students on when to quit and how to recognize pains from overloading and muscle failure.
- Teach exercises progressively. Allow free weights only for athletic training or advanced students in physical education.
- Approve students to use specific equipment, and keep written records of each student's training program and progression.
- Identify correct and incorrect techniques for each exercise.
- Display safety and instructional directions, preferably with illustrations, to make the average person understand the risk.
- Use safety quizzes to ensure student comprehension of skills, hazards, and rules. Retain the quizzes.

Weight room rules must be visibly posted, and the rules of conduct must be enforced at all times.

Examples of weight room rules include:

- Notify the instructor in advance of all maximum lift attempts.
- Wear proper footwear in the weight room at all times.
- Use a partner/spotter at all times. Stop and report an absent lifting partner immediately.
- Advise the instructor if you are ill or have any prolonged symptoms of illness.
- Advise the instructor if you have been injured.
- Use only equipment you have been instructed to operate.
- Clean up perspiration on benches with disinfectant.
- Advise an instructor of any hazards or concerns.
- Always use collars on bars, with no exceptions.
- No horseplay.
- Lift within your own limits.

Additional guidance and training/workshop opportunities may be available through the [Washington Interscholastic Athletic Association \(WIAA\)](#), [National Strength and Conditioning Association \(NSCA\)](#), [Society of Health and Physical Educators \(SHAPE\)](#).

If there are any questions about these recommendations or any issue addressed in this article, please feel free to contact a Risk Services Consultant at 206.394.9737

Sample Weight Room Checklist

Mark Yes, No or Not Applicable for each item:

- Y N N/A Students are supervised at all times while in the weight room
- Y N N/A The weight room is kept locked when not in use
- Y N N/A Safety rules, instructions, and warning signs are posted
- Y N N/A Exits are unobstructed, properly marked, and illuminated
- Y N N/A A process exists for emergency notification
- Y N N/A A stocked first aid kit is readily available
- Y N N/A Proper footwear and attire are required of users
- Y N N/A Trained spotters are used in free weight training
- Y N N/A Staff perform and document a thorough inspection of all equipment at least weekly

All Equipment

- Y N N/A Equipment is inspected before being used by students
- Y N N/A Surfaces with human skin contact are cleaned and disinfected daily
- Y N N/A Padding protective covers are free of tears, rips, and cracks
- Y N N/A Mats and floor surfacing do not present tripping, slipping, and falling hazards
- Y N N/A There is adequate separation between stations (2 to 3 feet minimum)
- Y N N/A Securing straps, elastic cords, and apparatus are functional and in good condition
- Y N N/A Weight equipment is bolted to the floor or counterweighted to prevent tipping
- Y N N/A Equipment is free of protrusions, burrs, and sharp edges that may cause injury
- Y N N/A Moving parts are regularly lubricated according to manufacturer recommendation
- Y N N/A Portable and unattached equipment is properly stored after use
- Y N N/A Students are instructed to report defective equipment immediately
- Y N N/A Defective equipment is removed and put out of service immediately
- Y N N/A Equipment is assembled by manufacturer or authorized personnel
- Y N N/A Equipment is serviced and repaired by manufacturer or authorized personnel

Exercise Machines

- Y N N/A Equipment is inspected before being used by students
- Y N N/A Components are regularly lubricated and cleaned
- Y N N/A Chains, cables, and belts are in good condition and properly aligned
- Y N N/A Nuts, bolts, screws, pins, and washers are tight and intact
- Y N N/A Equipment is free of worn, cracked defective parts and components

Free Weights

- Y N N/A Bars are properly lubricated and tightened
- Y N N/A Collars and safety equipment are always in use
- Y N N/A Benches, racks, and standards are secured to the floor or wall
- Y N N/A Nuts, bolts, screws, pins, and washers are tight and free from defects
- Y N N/A Aisles and pathways are not cluttered with equipment that may cause trips and falls

Y N N/A Free weights are kept a minimum of 4 feet from glass and/or mirrors
Y N N/A Defective equipment is removed and put out of service

Work order for repairs generated: Yes No

School/Building _____

Inspected by _____ Date: _____