

A B C D E F G Children's Health

Don't Ignore A Child's Heel Pain

(NAPSA)—Indoors and outdoors, children stay active year-round in competitive sports and other physical activities, but sometimes heel pain can leave them sitting on the sidelines. The American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons recommends that when a child complains of heel pain, it should be treated right away.

Heel pain commonly occurs in children ages 8 to 14 as their feet grow and the heel bone develops. "As more children get active in competitive sports, they increase their risk for growth-plate injuries and subsequent heel pain," said Matthew Williams, DPM, FACFAS, a podiatric foot and ankle surgeon in Walnut Creek, Calif.

Williams added that children and adolescents often are reluctant or unable to give a complete history or cooperate with a physical exam, so a thorough work-up is required to pinpoint the exact cause of the symptoms. "New bone forms in an area behind the heel, known as the growth plate, and cartilage is vulnerable to severe inflammation from strain or stress. With repeated stresses and strains from overactivity, the heel becomes very painful," he explained.

Even though growth-plate injury is the leading cause of heel pain in children, Williams said the condition can be difficult to diagnose. He cautioned that parents should be concerned if a child has pain in the back or bottom of the heel, limps, walks on the toes, or seems to have difficulty participating in normal recreational activities. To achieve an exact diagnosis, podiatric foot and ankle surgeons thoroughly examine the



Active children may experience heel pain, which could be a sign of a more serious condition.

child's foot and leg and often take x-rays.

Depending on the severity of the child's heel pain, treatments range from simply reducing physical activity to surgery. In most cases, mild or moderate heel pain can be treated successfully with shoe inserts to soften the impact on the heel, anti-inflammatory medications, stretching exercises and physical therapy. In severe cases, the foot and ankle will be immobilized in a cast and, in some instances, surgery might be necessary to lengthen the Achilles tendon or correct another problem.

Children's heel pain can return after treatment because the growth plate is still forming until the age of 14 or 15. However, the risk for recurrence can be lowered by choosing well-constructed shoes with good support and restricting use of spiked athletic shoes, especially on hard fields.

For further information about pediatric heel pain and to locate a podiatric foot and ankle surgeon in your area, visit www.FootPhysicians.com.