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Study says more than 15 percent of concussions come from impact with field, as focus turns to synthetic turf

By **Cam Smith, USA TODAY High School Sports** December 30, 2015

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Concerns about artificial turf surfaces have been linked with growing head trauma incidents — Twitter

In the ongoing search to get to the root of concussion and head trauma issues, potential influencing factors are often dissected and analyzed ad nauseam. It's rare that a truly new revelation emerges in the fight to protect football minds, yet a new study from the Concussion Legacy Foundation may have uncovered just such a leaf.

As brought to light by an article in the [New York Times](#), the aforementioned study, titled "[The Role of Synthetic Turf in Concussion](#)", used a bevy of data from football, lacrosse,

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soccer and other field sports to determine that 15.5 percent of concussions in high school sports occur when players hit their heads on the field. By comparison, one in seven concussions in the NFL occurs when the player's head hits the field.

The study urged groundskeepers and other officials to treat fields more regularly and responsibly as a critical step toward avoiding widespread head trauma.

"We have no national conversation on the technology underneath an athlete's feet," the authors wrote in their report. "Helmet technology is an area of great attention and investment, and surfaces deserve the same attention."

Critically, the spread of artificial turf is seen as a major contributing factor to increased incidents of brain trauma. The belief that artificial turf is a plug-and-play solution to field conditions may in fact be making head trauma more dangerous to all who compete in sports, particularly at the high school and youth levels.

"Artificial fields are still sold as maintenance-free — you put it down, you don't worry about it — but honestly, they're hardly being maintained at all," Dr. John Sorochan, co-director of the Center for Athletic Field Safety at the University of Tennessee, told the Times. "People put in the fields because they don't want to budget for it once they've got it."

That's a major issue for schools across the country, particularly as budget cuts eat into the ability to field teams at many schools in the first place, let alone provide additional upkeep for facilities.

In theory, the solution is simple: Use and take care of more athletic fields more responsibly and it may be possible to significantly eat into the number of head trauma incidents nationwide. Of course, that solution may be easier said than done, particularly with prominent artificial turf providers likely to solicit their own findings to run counter to those from the Concussion Legacy Foundation's.

In short, the battle over synthetic turf is just beginning.

artificial turf, football, lacrosse, New York Times, soccer, Outside The Box

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