

# **GYMNASTICS SAFETY GUIDELINES**

## **Introduction**

The following safety guidelines apply to a range of gymnastics activities from very elementary primary programs to high skill secondary competitive gymnastics.

The guidelines in this section apply to those forms of gymnastics referred to as educational gymnastics, Artistic gymnastics, Rhythmic gymnastics, Acrobatics, Aerobics, Cheerleading and Team Gym.

Where considered appropriate, for example inclusion in a school sport program, parents or caregivers must be informed of full details of the location, supervision to be provided and activities to be undertaken when seeking their written permission.

## **Teacher/Instructor Qualifications and Experience**

The teacher/instructor must have appropriate expertise and/or training in the teaching/coaching of gymnastics.

Gymnastics courses for primary and secondary school teachers can be accessed through the School Sport Unit Professional Learning program.

Schools wishing to use external providers to deliver gymnastics programs are encouraged to engage accredited providers.

A teacher must be present who has recognised current training in emergency care.

## **Supervision**

Principals and organising teachers must take into account such factors as age, experience, maturity of students, nature of the activity and experience of adult supervisors when arranging supervision and instruction.

The instructor must be positioned so that all the activities, including circuit work, can be appropriately supervised.

Where an adult other than a teacher is engaged to provide instruction, a teacher must be present to take overall responsibility.

## **Equipment**

Shorts or sports briefs and T-shirt should be worn. Leotards are optional.

Students should wear sports shoes in outdoor activities. Socked feet must not be permitted, except on a trampoline (not a mini trampoline).

All equipment must be checked for safety prior to each class or lesson and if defective, it must not be used.

The equipment should be of suitable height and width and appropriately arranged for the specific activities. It should be placed parallel to walls and adequately spaced to facilitate supervision.

Appropriate and adequate matting must be provided under and around all equipment to the point of likely projection. Ensure mats do not move out of position.

Matting must not overlap. Mats must be joined, with no ridges. Where possible, velcro-edged mats should be used. Mats with holes must not be used.

A well-equipped medical kit must be readily available.

## **Venues**

Where possible, gymnastics should be taught indoors on a wooden floor. If conducted outdoors, a grass surface is preferable to concrete or asphalt. In all cases, adequate matting must be used under and around equipment and for floor activities.

## **Safety**

### **General**

Small groups and short lines of students at each activity provides for maximum participation and lessens the possibility of loss of concentration and boredom.

Basic skills should be taught sequentially. Concentration, body awareness, control and tension provide the basis for safety in gymnastics and hence good basics are essential.

If a teacher does not consider the student capable of performing a skill, then the student must not attempt it. Graded progressive skills must be provided and mastered before attempting more difficult skills. If a student is not confident of performing a skill, he or she must not be forced to do so.

Students are to be instructed not to perform any unauthorised activities.

Students must remove jewellery and other ornaments likely to cause injury.

Students should be encouraged to keep fingernails and toenails short and long hair tied back.

Where possible, ice should be available for the treatment of injuries.

### **The following skills are not permitted in schools**

- Gymnastic Bridges
- Any form of somersaults
- Head stands
- Dive rolls

### **Please Note**

For all levels of New South Wales Combined High Schools Sports Association Gymnastic Competitions trained gymnasts are permitted to include the above skills in line with Gymnastics Australia competition requirements.

In outdoor venues, students are to be instructed to use adequate sun protection, e.g. an SPF50+, broad spectrum, water resistant sunscreen reapplied regularly and a hat when appropriate.

### **Flexibility and injury prevention**

An extreme range of flexibility in the joints can contribute to injury as can relative inflexibility. Inflexibility contributes to injury because less efficient techniques will result. Stretching and warming up are vital elements in preventing injury and the following points should be followed when stretching to ensure maximum safety:

- Warm-up prior to stretching.
- Stretch prior to and after work-outs.
- Stretch alternate muscle groups.
- Stretch gently and slowly.
- Never bounce or stretch rapidly.
- Stretch to the point with tension or discomfort but never pain.
- Do not hold the breath when stretching, breathe slowly and easily while stretching.

There are a number of movements that are potentially dangerous that teachers should note when developing programs. These include:

- Extreme movements that cause extension or flexion of a joint beyond its normal range, e.g. back arches, toe touches and deep knee bends.
- Movements that involve excessive, rapid or repetitive twisting around a fixed base, e.g. wall slaps, trunk rotations.
- Sustained or held movements, e.g. held sit-up.
- Repetitive movements, e.g. arm circling through a small range of movement.

Other movements such as running backwards should be avoided due to the potential for tripping over or running into obstacles.

There are a number of activities that are considered inappropriate for inclusion in a gymnastic session. Those to be avoided include:

- Weight bearing on the head, as childrens' neck strength is not sufficiently developed.
- Activities that involve excessive flexion, e.g. frog-jump repetitions.
- Hanging by knees from apparatus.
- Dive rolls.

Particular caution is required with mini-trampolines or when mounting or dismounting apparatus. Adequate supervision, correct technique and a safe landing area are required.

Students must be instructed in safety procedures and spotting techniques. Spotters or padders should be used at all apparatus, as appropriate. For high level skills, either the teacher or the instructor should pad.

## **Spotting**

The emphasis in beginner programs should be on encouraging the development of competent body management skills. Students should not depend on spotting to perform skills at the beginner level but as the skill level rises, spotting becomes important. Teachers and/or instructors must be aware of the following points on spotting:

- When the skill level is low, the need for spotting is greatly reduced.
- In higher level programs, spotting becomes progressively more important.
- The spotting skills of the teacher or the instructor should match the performance level of the gymnast.
- Incompetent spotting is potentially dangerous. Spotting should never be used as a substitute for:
  - Inadequate physical exercise.
  - Poor equipment.
  - Poor technical preparation.
  - Forcing the gymnast to attempt a skill before the prerequisites are mastered.

To reduce the need for students to 'spot', instructors should plan sessions where difficult apparatus activities are located at one work station. Instructors are then able to spot performers whilst the remainder of the group work independently on basic skills at alternative stations.

## **Tumbling**

- For all skills which require more than one mat, firm velcro-joined mats or a continuous carpeted mat should be used.
- For advanced skills, a tumbling sprung floor is desirable, with crash mats used during the learning of skills.
- Only very basic skills are to be taught on concrete or asphalt surfaces and, only with appropriate matting.

## **Mini and double mini trampoline**

- Equipment must have correctly fitted safety pads.

- Beds must be inspected for tears and the springs checked to ensure hook ends are facing downwards.
- There must be non-slip rubber stoppers attached to the legs of the trampolines.
- Crash mats must be kept in place so that there is no movement away from the apparatus.
- Coaching should start with basic skills emphasising firm body position and spatial awareness.
- Skills must be graded. Students do not progress until they have mastered basic skills.
- Landings should be controlled. Students should walk forward along the mat at the completion of the skill.
- There must only be one student on the apparatus at any time.
- All students must be taught how to spot and pad.
- Where students are spotting or padding, one student must be stationed on each side of the performer.

## **Hand Held Apparatus**

### **Hoops**

- Should be round and not out of shape.
- Suitable size for the participant. i.e hoop should come to students hip.
- Should be smooth to touch.
- Plastic or wooden hoops are recommended.

### **Rope**

- The rope may be composed of hemp or of synthetic material which retains the qualities of lightness and suppleness. Sailing rope made of cotton is most suitable.
- Ends should be knotted for safety.
- Length is determined by the athlete standing on the rope and the knots reaching to under the arm pit.

### **Ball**

- Ball size of 18cm-20cm round is ideal.

- Ball should be made of rubber.
- Should be well pumped to allow ease in bouncing and tossing activities.

**The following apparatus are not essential for school gymnastics program(s) and are considered optional extras:**

### **Vaulting**

- A soft stacker vault with velcroed segments is suitable for use.
- All vaulting apparatus must be in good condition. The organisation, thickness and placement of mats must be appropriate for the type of vaulting apparatus in use, and the difficulty of the skill. Mats with holes must not be used.
- Before using the vaulting box, the student must be proficient in the use of the beat board and must be taught the skills involved in approach, take off and landing.
- Basic skills involving flight, spring, body awareness and control are essential for both performer and spotter safety.
- The height of the vaulting apparatus must be adjusted to suit the ability level and experience of the participants.
- All vaults must have competent and experienced spotters or padders stationed on each side of the performer. Spotters or padders must be positioned appropriately for the vault being performed, e.g. in front of (descent side) the vaulting box for straddle and through vaults (refer to the previous section on spotting).
- Correct lifting techniques must be taught when the vaulting apparatus is being moved. If a vaulting box is to be moved, it should be carried in segments to minimise the weight.

### **Uneven Bars**

- No zippered clothing should be worn.
- Tracksuit pants should not be worn as they can be slippery on the bars.
- Chalk (magnesium powder) should be used to prevent hands slipping.
- Where long periods of practice are required, students must wear leather handgrips.
- All activities must be graded and progressive.
- Bars must be correctly assembled and securely anchored. Floor plates and wires must be checked to ensure they are secure prior to each class or session.
- Appropriate matting must be placed under the bars and in the landing area.

- Spotters must be used at all times and padders used when new skills are being attempted.

### **Beam**

- Checks must be made to ensure that the height adjustment fitting is tight, the beam is securely attached to the legs and that the apparatus is stable.
- Students are to be instructed not to adjust the height of the beam without permission.
- Skills should first be taught on the floor, then low beam and finally, high beam.
- Matting must be placed under the beam, around the leg supports, and on the landing area.

### **Roman Rings**

- Chalk should be used to prevent hands slipping.
- For long periods of practice, students should be encouraged to wear leather handgrips.
- Appropriate matting must be placed under the rings and in the landing area.
- At least one spotter or padder must be stationed at the apparatus.
- Students should start with basic skills and progress through a sequence of graded activities.

### **Parallel Bars**

- Equipment must be checked to ensure that all fittings are secure and the apparatus is stable and that bars are appropriately spaced to accommodate the skill activity.
- Chalk should be used to prevent hands slipping.
- Appropriate matting must be placed under the bars and in the landing area.
- Students should start with basic skills. Strength and technique must be of a sufficient level before more advanced activities are attempted.
- At least one spotter or padder must be stationed at the apparatus. It is vital to pad from beneath the bars to avoid serious injury to the padder.

### **Horizontal Bar**

- The bar must be checked to ensure it is correctly assembled and securely anchored. Floor plates and wires must be checked to ensure they are secure.

- Chalk should be used to prevent hands slipping.
- For long periods of practice students should be encouraged to wear leather handgrips.
- Appropriate matting must be placed under the bar and in the landing area.
- At least one spotter or padder must be stationed at the apparatus.
- Students should start with basic skills and progress through a sequence of graded activities.

**Provided by:  
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