

## GAA MOUTHGUARD INFORMATION

### INFORMATION FOR CLUBS, COACHES, PLAYERS AND PARENTS

#### BACKGROUND

Since January 1st 2014, it has been mandatory for all players to wear a mouthguard in all Gaelic football practice sessions and games.

#### KEY POINTS

- Gaelic footballers must wear a mouthguard.
- It is the responsibility of each individual player to use a mouthguard
- A properly fitted mouthguard is the best available protective device for reducing the incidence and severity of sports-related dental injuries
- Players can be sent-off in a game for not wearing a mouthguard
- Players will not be covered under the GAA player injury scheme if they don't comply with the mouthguard rule
- No Mouthguard? No Game!

This document has been compiled to assist GAA Clubs, players, parents, coaches and referees in complying with the provisions of the rule.

#### ABOUT MOUTHGUARDS

*There are three types of mouthguard:*

**Stock mouthguards** are preformed and come ready to wear. They are inexpensive and can generally be purchased in sports shops for in or around €5 each. However, little can be done to adjust their fit, they are bulky, can make breathing and talking difficult, and they provide limited protection. Dentists do not recommend their use, nonetheless, once they carry the CE (European Conformity) mark they are acceptable in terms of complying with the new rules.

**Boil and bite mouthguards** can also be bought over the counter at most sports shops



and generally offer a better fit than stock mouth protectors. The 'boil and bite' mouthguard is made from thermoplastic material. It is placed in hot water to soften, then placed in the mouth and shaped around the teeth using finger and tongue pressure. Dentists do not recommend their use in general. Typically this type of mouthguard will cost in the region of €8 to

€33 and again any mouthguard with the CE mark on it in this category is sufficient to ensure compliance with the new rule.



*Official OPRO GAA/GPA boil and bite mouthguards are available for purchasing through the following retailers: Supervalu, Centra, Lifestyle Sports, Elverys, O'Neills and Heatons*

**Custom-fitted mouthguards** are individually designed and made in a dental office or a professional laboratory based on your dentist's instructions. These will not just offer the best protection against dental and oral injury but they should not affect performance i.e. breathing and speech should be relatively unaffected particularly if these have been worn regularly. Firstly, your dentist will make an impression of your teeth and a mouthguard is then moulded over the model using a special material. Due to the use of the special material and because of the extra time and work involved, a custom made mouthguard is more expensive than the other types, but it provides the most comfort and protection.





*Custom-fitted mouthguards by OPRO are available from a network of dentists nationwide.*

Prices can vary significantly and it is worth seeking and comparing prices from a number of practitioners before deciding to purchase. Typically a custom-fitted mouthguard should cost between €50 and €75. However, many dental practices offer significant reductions to GAA Clubs that are ordering in bulk. GAA Clubs can generally liaise with dental centres and clinics to arrange for someone to visit the Club on a given day to take dental impressions from a number of players. Custom-fitted mouthguards purchased in bulk in this manner should cost around €30 to €50 each.



*To find a list of dentists and dental centres in your area, you can use the 'Find a Dentist' function on the Irish Dental Association's website - <http://www.dentist.ie/find-a-dentist.10.html>.*



*In addition, to find a dentist in Britain, you can use the 'Find a Dentist' function offered by the British Dental Association - <http://www.bda-findadentist.org.uk/>.*



*OPRO Custom-fitted range - <http://www.gaa.ie/tickets-and-merchandise/merchandise/mouthguards/>*

#### WHICH TYPE OF MOUTHGUARD SHOULD I PURCHASE?

The decision on which type of mouthguard a player should obtain is a matter of personal preference. There is no doubt that custom-fitted mouthguards offer the best fit and protection but they are the most expensive option also. The 'stock' and 'boil and bite' options will suffice for compliance with the rules, but only if the product carries the CE mark. It is essential that a player feels that his mouthguard is properly fitted. Should a player feel that this is not the case; we would strongly advise that dental practitioners are consulted with.



In terms of underage players, it should be borne in mind that teeth and mouths are still developing up until about 12 years of age and young players may grow out of custom-fitted mouthguards over a period time. However, dental practitioners are ultimately in the best position to give advice to individuals in this context.

#### **HYGIENE ADVICE**

- Mouthguards can be rinsed with cold water or with a mouth rinse before and after each use and /or cleaned with toothpaste and a toothbrush
- Occasionally clean the mouthguard in cool, soapy water and rinse it thoroughly
- Place the mouthguard in a firm, perforated container to store or transport it, this permits air circulation and helps to prevent damage
- Protect the mouthguard from high temperatures - such as hot water, hot surfaces, or direct sunlight to minimise distorting its shape
- Occasionally check the mouthguard for general wear, if you find holes or tears in it or if it becomes loose or causes discomfort, replace it
- Bring the mouthguard to each regularly scheduled dental visit to have your dentist exam it

#### **ROLE OF THE REFEREE**

If a player refuses to comply with a Referee's instruction to wear a mouthguard, he will incur the penalty as outlined in (Rule 6.2, Rules of Foul Play, The Playing Rules of Football, Official Guide, Part 2, 2012) '*Caution the offender; order off if he persists*'.

#### **ROLE OF THE PLAYER**

In all Football Games and Practice Football Sessions, it shall be mandatory for, and the responsibility of, each individual player to use a mouthguard.

#### **ROLE OF THE CLUB**

Clubs should ensure that their players, player's parents/guardians, coaches and team mentors are made aware of the mouthguard rules.



## **ROLE OF THE OFFICIAL GAA COACH IN SCHOOLS**

If an official GAA coach is coaching Gaelic football in primary schools then children must wear a mouthguard to participate in a practice session or game.

## **PE LESSONS IN SCHOOLS**

In terms of PE lessons, the GAA has no control over what activities or games teachers choose to deliver during PE time. However, we would advise that wearing mouthguards for Gaelic games will significantly reduce the risk of sustaining dental injuries and that it would be prudent for each School to have a policy in this regard.

## **GAA PLAYER INJURY SCHEME**

Players will not be covered under the player injury scheme if they are not wearing a mouthguard. In all Football Games and Practice Football Sessions, it shall be mandatory for, and the responsibility of, each individual player to use a mouthguard.

## **INJURY PREVENTION**

Research figures indicate that Ireland has one of the highest rates of sport-related oral injuries in the EU, with one third of all adult dental injuries being sports-related. In many sports such as rugby and hockey the wearing of mouthguards, also known as 'mouth guards' or 'gum shields' is the norm with nearly all Clubs adhering strictly to a 'no gumshield - no game' rule. A recent survey of Irish parents found the average cost of emergency dental treatment for sport related dental injuries in children to be €214.23. Studies have also shown that the overall injury risk is close to twice as high when a mouthguard is not worn, relative to when a mouthguard is used during athletic activity.

The introduction of this rule has led to a drop of 37% in the number of dental injury claims made via the GAA Injury benefit fund, resulting from incidents in Gaelic football training sessions and matches in grades up to Minor in 2013. At adult level a similar drop of 39% occurred in 2014 proving the benefits of wearing a mouthguard in reducing the risk of dental injuries.



The GAA's Medical, Scientific and Welfare Committee has acknowledged that the use of a properly fitted mouthguard is the best available protective device for reducing the incidence and severity of sports-related dental injuries and was centrally involved in ensuring the introduction of compulsory mouthguards in Gaelic football.

#### LIMITATION OF LEGAL LIABILITY

These Rules shall not impose on any Referee, Linesman, Umpire, Sideline Official, Team Official or Unit any legal duty of care or legal responsibility (which duty shall remain with individual Players, and if relevant, Parents, Guardians or other persons legally responsible for them).

#### SOME QUESTIONS.

**1. What will happen if I am not wearing a mouthguard in a game?**

A. If a player refuses to comply with a Referee's instruction to wear a mouthguard, he will initially be cautioned by the Referee and if the player continues to refuse, the Referee can send him off.

**2. Who is responsible for ensuring mouthguards are worn at training or practice sessions?**

A. It is the responsibility of each individual player to use a mouthguard. Clubs and players should note that players will not be covered under the GAA Player Injury Scheme if they are not wearing a mouthguard.

**3. Do players have to wear a mouthguard in Hurling games?**

A. No. The rule only applies to Gaelic football; however, wearing a mouthguard whilst playing Hurling does reduce the risk of dental injury.

**4. Our Club has a nursery, are children in these juvenile age groups exempt from wearing a mouthguard?**

A. No. The Medical, Scientific and Welfare Committee advise that children should begin wearing a mouthguard at whatever age they start playing. Young mouths need protecting



too and if players start wearing mouthguards at a young age this will add greatly to the development of a culture of wearing mouthguards in Gaelic football.

**5. Does this rule apply to Ladies Football?**

The Ladies Gaelic Football Association has announced that from January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, all underage players must wear a mouthguard whilst playing Ladies Gaelic Football.

**6. Does the rule regarding the wearing of mouthguards apply to games in Primary Schools?**

A. If an official GAA coach is coaching Gaelic Football in primary schools then children must wear a mouthguard to participate in a practice session or game.

**7. Do children have to wear mouthguards for PE sessions?**

In terms of PE lessons, the GAA has no control over what activities or games teachers choose to deliver during PE time. However, we would advise that wearing mouthguards for Gaelic games will significantly reduce the risk of sustaining dental injuries.

**8. Does the rule regarding the wearing of mouthguards apply to Cumann na mBunscol Football practice sessions and games?**

A. Cumann na mBunscol Náisiúnta are subject to the General Rules of the Association, it is a matter for each School to ensure that the rule is adhered to by their pupils in practice sessions and football games.

**10. Do I have to wear a mouthguard whilst playing Second Level games?**

A. Yes.

**11. Do I have to wear a mouthguard whilst playing Third Level games?**

A. Yes.

**12. Does this apply to overseas players?**

A. Yes. International Units are subject to the General Rules of the Association.

**13. I'm a referee; do I have to check all players' mouths before a game to ensure compliance?**



A. Referees are not be expected to individually check players before a game; however, if a referee notices that a player is not wearing a mouthguard, he should caution the player and if the player still refuses to wear one, he should be sent off.

**14. I currently wear orthodontic braces, what are my options?**

A. It has been noted that children wearing orthodontic braces and wishing to play Gaelic football will be particularly concerned about the rule change; however, the GAA recommends that these players seek advice from a range of dental practitioners on the most appropriate solution for them.

**15. Is there an official GAA/GPA mouthguard?**

A. Yes, there is a full range of official OPRO GAA/GPA mouthguards available in bronze, silver, gold, platinum, junior and custom-fitted ranges. Official OPRO GAA/GPA 'boil and bite' mouthguards are available for purchasing through the following retailers: SuperValu, Centra, Lifestyle Sports, Elvery Sports, O'Neills and Heatons. Custom-fitted mouthguards are available through a network of dentists nationwide -

**MORE INFORMATION**

*Medical and Player Welfare – E: [playerwelfare@gaa.ie](mailto:playerwelfare@gaa.ie), T: (0) 1 865 868610*

*GAA/GPA Mouthguards – E: [barry.cahill@gaa.ie](mailto:barry.cahill@gaa.ie)*

**For the latest information, visit –**

[www.learning.gaa.ie/mouthguards](http://www.learning.gaa.ie/mouthguards)