

TIPS TO KEEP MARCHING BANDS HEALTHY AND HYDRATED ON THE FIELD

Timely Recommendations to Ensure Band Members are Well Prepared for Activity

DALLAS, August 8, 2006 – With the beat of a drum, the blow of a whistle, and the blare of the brass section, marching bands across the country are practicing formations and new musical routines in anticipation of the start of school year. Recognizing the unique needs of these performers, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) has issued timely guidelines to ensure safety on the field and in the parade line.

“Marching band members, just like athletes, need to be well conditioned and prepared for the rigors of band practices and performances. These unique athletes are often in formations for long periods of time, wearing heavy clothing in warm weather conditions, and carrying instruments that require dexterity and strength,” said Brian Robinson, MS, ATC, chair of NATA’s Secondary School Athletic Trainers’ Committee. “It’s critical for band directors to work closely with school athletic trainers and medical professionals to develop a safety protocol to ensure band members march on the field fit to perform at their best.”

NATA recommends the following tips for parents, band directors, medical professionals and marching band members:

1. **Prepare for Activity:** Students participating in marching bands should receive a general health exam prior to activity to make sure they are fit to perform. Be sure to discuss any pre-existing conditions with the physician.
2. **Put a Plan Into Place:** Develop a written emergency plan in consultation with an athletic trainer and local emergency medical service. Share it regularly and review it with the appropriate band directors/supervisors, school administrators and medical staff.
3. **Get Ready to March:** Band directors, athletic trainers and parents should ensure that students are physically and mentally conditioned for marching band activities. Encourage students to start with 20 minute walks outside and gradually increase distance of time approximately four weeks before the marching band season starts. Limber up with appropriate stretches and warm ups and cool downs after practice. Increase rigorous routines gradually so students can tone their muscles and increase strength. This will help to reduce aches and pains as well as fatigue from long practices and challenging routines.

4. **Acclimatize to the Heat:** Acclimatize students to outdoor warm weather conditions. Start routines slowly and build endurance. By working out and walking in the heat or non-air conditioned environments, students can condition their bodies to adapt and better perform in the heat.
5. **What to Wear:** Wear light or white colored shorts and t-shirts to avoid overheating during practice. This is especially important for anyone carrying heavy instruments for long periods of time. Save the formal attire – heavy hats, dark clothing and shoes – for dress rehearsals and get comfortable in them before game day. Be aware that the weight of the material and dark colors keep heat “in.”
6. **Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate:** Establish a hydration plan that allows band members to drink water or sports drinks such as Gatorade throughout practice sessions (about 7-10 ounces ever 10-20 minutes). It is important to hydrate before AND after routines. Without proper hydration, they are at risk of developing exertional heat related illnesses. Make sure that band members have sports drinks and water should always be available. Don't assume they can share with sports teams.
7. **Seek Shade:** Be smart when it comes to the sun. Stand in the shade during rest breaks or half time to cool down before and after practices and performances.
8. **Fuel for Success:** Incorporate healthy foods in the daily diet including grains, fruits and vegetables, dairy and meat/poultry/fish to give them the fuel they need to exercise. A balanced and moderate approach is always the best bet.
9. **Make Use of Musical Instruments:** Students should hold and manage sousaphones, drums, flutes and other instruments correctly to avoid ergonomic injuries.
10. **Stay Fit in Formation:** Since bands are often in formation and standing still for long periods of time – especially when on parade routes or during practice – students should move fingers, knees and toes slightly to keep circulation flowing and joints loose and flexible.
11. **Monitor Band Members:** Band members should be monitored at all times on the field for signs of heat illnesses by a parent, band director, certified athletic trainer or other individual.
12. **Inspect Fields and Routes:** Remove debris, water, rocks and other hazards from the field or parade route. These small obstacles can lead to twisted ankles, bruised knees, scraped elbows or other more serious injuries.

13. **Stock the Kit:** Stock a first aid kit and keep it onsite for medical emergencies. Include supplies for wound management and bee stings, such as elastic wraps and band aids, disposable ice packs, tape and wound cleanser, among other items.

“Athletic trainers are always on the frontline should a band member not feel well or need immediate care in the event of injury or illness, said Robinson. “Our goal is to prevent the injury from happening in the first place. By putting these guidelines into practice, band directors and their members can enjoy a season rich in music and highly spirited routines.”

For more information on youth sports and sports safety, please visit

<http://www.nata.org/youthsports/index.htm>.

About the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA):

Athletic trainers (ATCs) are unique health care providers who specialize in the prevention, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and illnesses. The National Athletic Trainers' Association represents and supports 30,000 members of the athletic training profession through education and research. www.nata.org. NATA, 2952 Stemmons Freeway, Ste. 200, Dallas, TX 75247, 214.637.6282; 214.637.2206 (fax).