

Mouthguards and the GAA

Information for Clubs, Players and Parents

BACKGROUND

Following the GAA's Annual Congress in April 2012 a new rule was enacted that made it mandatory to use a mouthguard in all Gaelic football matches and training sessions from January 1st 2013 (for all age grades up to and including minor) and at U21 and Adult level from January 1st 2014.

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 gumshields 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 dental treatment for sport related dental injuries in children to be €213.14. Studies have also shown that the overall injury risk is close to twice as high when a mouthguard is not worn, relative to when mouthguards were used during athletic activity.

The GAA's Medical, Scientific & Welfare Committee acknowledge 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.

This information sheet has been compiled to assist GAA Clubs and individual players in complying with the provisions of the new rule passed at Congress 2012.

ABOUT MOUTHGUARDS

There are three types of mouth guards:

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 GAA Rules.

Official Opro GAA/GPA stock mouthguards will be available for purchasing through your local retailers: Supervalu, Centra, Lifestyle and Elverys.

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 these type of mouthguards will cost in the region of €15 to €20 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 & bite mouthguards will be available for purchasing through your local retailers: Supervalu, Centra, Lifestyle and Elverys.

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.

First, your dentist will make an impression of your teeth and a mouth guard is then molded over the model using a special material. Due to the use of the special material and because of the extra time and work involved, this custom-made mouth guard is more expensive than the other types, but it provides the most comfort and protection.

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 mouth-guard should cost between €60 and €120. However, many dental practices offer significant reductions to GAA Clubs who 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 Associations Website - <http://www.dentist.ie/find-a-dentist.10.html>

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 & Bite options will suffice for compliance with the new rules, but only if the product carries the CE mark.

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, your dental practitioner is ultimately in the best position to advise in this context.

COMPLYING WITH THE NEW RULE

The GAA recognise that Clubs may be worried about compliance with the new rules and specifically what will happen if a player forgets or does not have a mouthguard on the day of a game. The suggestion in this context is that each Club should purchase a supply of the Stock or Boil and Bite mouthguards for use in such situations.

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 II, 2012*) '*Caution the offender; order off if he persists*'.

SOME QUESTIONS

1. When does the new rule come into effect?

- A. From January 1st 2013, all players playing in grades up to and including Minor will be required to wear a mouthguard in all football games and at practice sessions.

2. When does the ruling come into effect for adult players?

- A. From January 1st, 2014 all players at all grades will be required to wear a mouthguard in all football games and practice sessions.

3. 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.

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

A. It is a matter for each Club to ensure the rule is adhered to at training or practice sessions. Clubs and players should note that Players will not be covered under the player injury scheme if they are not wearing a mouthguard.

5. Do players have to wear a mouthguard in hurling games?

A. No. The new rule only applies to football; however, wearing a mouthguard when playing hurling does reduce the risk of dental injury.

6. I am a Minor playing on an adult team in 2013. Do I have to wear a mouthguard?

A. Not in 2013. The wearing of mouthguards in 2013 is compulsory at all age grades up to minor. However, a player playing at U-21 or adult level in 2013 is not required to wear a mouthguard under rule. From January 1st 2014 all players at all grades must wear a mouthguard.

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

A. No. The Medical, Scientific & 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.

8. Does the new rule regarding the wearing of Gum Shields apply to Cumann na mBunscol games?

A. Yes.

9. If so, who is responsible for ensuring that they should be worn?

- A. In general it is a matter for each Club to ensure this; however, in this case it is a matter for each School to ensure the rule is adhered to at training or practice sessions. To avoid a scenario whereby children may forget their mouthguard, the GAA recommends that Schools purchase a reserve of stock mouthguards.

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

- A. Yes. From January 1st 2013, all Second Level players will be required to wear a mouthguard in all football games and at practice sessions.

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

- A. Not in 2013. From January 1st 2014 all players at all grades must wear a mouthguard.

12. Does this apply to overseas players?

- A. Yes.

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

- A. Referee's will 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. A supplier of custom fitted mouthguards has contacted my club and offered to measure players for custom fitted guards, what does the GAA advise?

- A. It is a matter for each individual club to decide whether they want to engage with industry suppliers in this context or not. The GAA nationally has no preferred suppliers in this area.

15. Which type of mouthguard should I purchase?

- A. 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 & Bite options will suffice for compliance with the new rules, but only if the product carries the CE mark.

16. 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.

17. Is there an official GAA/GPA mouthguard?

- A. Official Opro GAA/GPA stock and boil & bite mouthguards will be available for purchasing through your local retailers: Supervalu, Centra, Lifestyle and Elverys.

If you have any queries or would like more information, please contact Games & Player Welfare Administrator Ruairí Harvey: Telephone: (0) 1 865 8685; E-mail: ruairi.harvey@gaa.ie