

Health Tips for Marching Band

Timely Recommendations to Ensure Band Members are Well Prepared for Activity

Source: National Athletic Trainers Association

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

1. **Prepare for Activity:** Parents should make sure that students are in good general health and fit to perform.
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 every 10-20 minutes). It is important to hydrate before AND after routines. Without proper hydration, they are at risk of developing an exertional heat related illness(es). Make sure that band members have sports drinks and water 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.