

## AUSTRALIA'S MOST DANGEROUS SPORTS REVEALED IN NEW RESEARCH REPORT BY MEDIBANK PRIVATE

It's official – Squash is one of the most popular sports in Australia; Australians are 'loners' rather than team players when it comes to sports; approximately 5.2 million people are expected to be injured through exercise this year; ACT residents are the fittest; Tasmanians are the heaviest; and July is a peak injury risk period.

These are just a few of the revelations to emerge from the *Medibank Private Safe Sports Report 2006* launched today.

The report combines independent research into Medibank Private's customer base, with Australian exercise participation data, and academic modelling and commentary by leading sports physician, Dr Peter Larkins.

Medibank Private's Managing Director George Savvides explained that the 2006 report contains statistics about the incidence of sports-related injuries and highlights the physical, economic and emotional 'costs' of injury.

"Our intention is not to scare people off exercise, but rather to reinforce the importance of injury prevention techniques and private health insurance regardless of whether you're part of a team, exercise alone, or have a social 'hit' or 'kick' with mates," he said.

"Accidents can still occur even when you take precautionary measures, and for Australians without private health cover, this can mean large medical bills, long waiting periods and huge additional stress on top of the injury set-back."

According to the *Medibank Private Safe Sports Report 2006*, the top 10 most injury-prone sports (based on patient presentations to Australian hospital emergency departments and general medical practices) are:

1. Australian Rules Football
2. Basketball
3. Netball
4. Running
5. Tennis
6. Cricket
7. Soccer
8. Aerobics
9. Rugby League
10. Rugby Union

Other interesting findings featured in the report include:

- sports injuries cost the Australian community about \$2 billion per year;
- 'individual' rather than 'team-based' activities are more popular amongst active Australians - walking, aerobics/fitness, swimming and golf rank in the top five participation activities;
- Australia's fittest State (per capita) is the ACT which has 76.1% physically active residents, with Western Australia coming a close second (with 74.9%);
- South Australia takes out the 'wooden spoon' in the sports participation stakes – being the least active State with 57.7% of residents taking part in regular activity;
- in terms of average body mass, Tasmania tips the scales as the heaviest State (with an average body mass index of 27.20 per person), followed by New South Wales and the ACT (both 25.88);

- Western Australians were shown to be the lightest, with an average body mass index of 24.91 per person;
- the highest risk age group for injury was 18 to 24 year-olds;
- most common sports injuries are knee (16%), ankle (11%), general bruising and cuts (8%) and back (7%);and
- sports injury rates peak during the winter months of May, June and July because cold muscles, tendons and ligaments increase the risk of being hurt.

Dr Peter Larkins said an encouraging result was that almost all Medibank Private members said they took precautions to prevent injuries; and compared with the *Medibank Sports Injuries Report 2004* results, an increased percentage warm up and cool down.

“In general, the active population is taking greater precautions against injury when exercising than in the past, however, the incidence of injury is not showing a corresponding reduction,” Dr Larkins said.

“Three in five survey participants attributed their injury to an accident or ‘just bad luck’.

“The fact that many injuries are not the result of poor preparation or protection, but rather ‘bad luck’, highlights the need for casual and regular sportspersons to have private health insurance.”

The *Medibank Private Safe Sports Report 2006* found more people took time off work due to an injury (with 27% taking an average of 11 days off work) than the *Medibank Private Sports Injuries Report 2004* when 15% took an average of nine days off work.

Dr Peter Larkins has the following recommendations to reduce the risk of injury when participating in physical activity.

- Get the correct advice on the right activity program for you. Speak to your GP, a fitness instructor at your local gym or a personal trainer.
- Warm up and cool down. Warming up before exercise is the best way to reduce the risk of injury because cold joints, tendons and muscles are more likely to get sprained or strained by sudden movement or exertion. It increases muscle blood flow, joint mobility and muscle flexibility. Cooling down helps to prevent soreness and assist recovery of the muscles. It also stabilises your heart and blood pressure rate.
- Use tape or bandages to brace vulnerable joints and prevent them from slipping beyond their comfortable range of motion.
- Keep hydrated – you can lose around one-and-a-half litres of fluid every hour of exercise.
- Listen to your body – make sure you have at least one recovery day, and preferably two recovery days, each week.
- Injuries need to rest – trying to ‘work through’ the pain will cause more damage to soft muscle tissue and delay healing.