



IRFU Position Paper Cardiac screening for the Domestic Game

Introduction:

The purpose of this position paper is to outline the IRFU position on cardiac screening in Rugby Union.

Rugby Union is a popular sport that requires a range of strength, endurance and fitness requirements. Tasks including running, throwing, kicking, balance, agility speed and tackling are all the skills required to play the game of rugby, which can be played enjoyed both socially and competitively. Rugby is a game that is uniquely suited for all shapes and sizes, girls and boys, of all ages and abilities. It can be enjoyed in many forms, from fifteens to sevens to non-contact games.

The physical health benefits of playing Rugby Union include the development of cardiovascular fitness, speed and endurance, strength in the upper and lower body, as well as ball-handling and kicking skills. Rugby also brings mental health benefits, including social interaction, communication and organisational skills, self-discipline and team work.

Physical activity has both disease prevention and health promoting properties. Regular physical activity enhances wellbeing, physical and mental health and prevents disease. For adults, achieving the recommended 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on at least 5 days a week helps to prevent and manage over 20 chronic conditions. For children the recommendation is a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderately intense physical activity each day. At least twice a week, this should include activities that produce high physical stresses on the bone and improve muscle strength and flexibility. In Ireland recent data suggests that two thirds of the adult population are physically inactive. Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for death worldwide.

The health benefits of regular exercise and physical activity are hard to ignore:

1. Exercise can help prevent excess weight gain and helps maintain weight loss.
2. Exercise combats many diseases. Regular exercise can help protect you from heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure, noninsulin-dependent diabetes, obesity, back pain, osteoporosis, and can improve your mood and help you to better manage stress.
3. Exercise improves mood by stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed.
4. Exercise boosts energy helping your heart to work more efficiently
5. Exercise can help you fall asleep faster and deepen your sleep.

The bottom line is - the health benefits of physical activity far outweigh the risks of engaging in that activity.



Sudden Cardiac Death

Sudden cardiac death in sport is very rare with an estimated overall incidence of sudden cardiac death estimated at between 0.5 and 2.5 per 100,000 per year in those under 35 years of age. Screening can reduce the risk of SADS, but does not exclude it completely. It is acknowledged that approximately 30% of athletes suffering sudden cardiac death will not be identified even with intensive cardiac screening

IRFU cardiac screening:

For those players who wish to undergo cardiac screening the IRFU recommends following the World Rugby guidelines available on line at <https://www.world.rugby/news/572984/cardiac-screening> the World Rugby screening questionnaire is available on line at https://resources.world.rugby/worldrugby/document/2020/06/29/1dea5be0-8018-418a-90e0-78611ff9a836/Cardiac_Screening_Questionnaire_EN.pdf

The IRFU strongly advocates that every school and club has a defibrillator (AED) available for each game (see IRFU AED policy).

References:

1. Reducing the Risk: A Strategic Approach. The Report of the Task Force on Sudden Cardiac Death Published by the Department of Health and Children. P23. www.doh.ie March 2006 ISBN1-873820-74-7.
2. World Rugby Cardiac screening guidelines <https://www.world.rugby/news/572984/cardiac-screening>
3. Fuller CM. Cost effectiveness analysis of screening of high school athletes for risk of sudden cardiac death. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 2000;32:887–90