

RUGBYSAFE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

Protective Equipment

As rugby union grows, so too does the market in protective equipment. While many items are suitable for rugby, it is important to be aware that all clothing, footwear and protective equipment worn during any rugby activity should comply with World Rugby regulations. The Rugby Football Union (RFU) works closely with World Rugby (WR) to ensure that protective equipment is safe and appropriate for use while training and playing.

Before buying any protective equipment especially more bespoke items, it is important to check that it is compliant and can be safely worn while taking part in any rugby activity. It is the responsibility of the manufacturer/retailer to take the necessary measures to ensure the item is compliant; this is often evidenced with a WR approved label.



World Rugby's Law 4 and Regulation 12 cover wearable protective equipment specifications. Detailed information can be found at: Law 4: <http://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=4> and Regulation 12:

www.worldrugby.org/wr-resources/WorldRugbyDIR/Handbook/English/index.html#/214/

World Rugby provide a list of approved items and suppliers for head guards, shoulder pads and women's protective clothing which can be found at: www.irbplayerwelfare.com/?documentid=53

Mouthguards

The RFU strongly recommends that mouth guards (also referred to as gum shields) are worn for any contact rugby activity (both training and matches). The use of mouthguards can help to protect the teeth and face. However, there is currently no conclusive evidence that mouth guards reduce the risk of concussion.

It is recommended that mouthguards are custom-fitted. There are alternatives available, such as boil in the bag or pre-moulded mouth guards, which generally provide a reduced level of fit and protection, so this should be a consideration when making a decision on which type to buy. There is currently no recognised British Standard kite-mark for mouth guards but they are classed as items of personal protective equipment (PPE) and therefore should have a CE mark. This means the mouth guard is compliant with appropriate British and EU testing and standards.



Dentists usually offer a custom-fit mouth guard provision and there are also a number of companies who provide this service. Clubs/schools should ensure that these companies are reputable and provide an appropriate service. In any case, it is important that mouth guards have a CE mark.

Schools and clubs may choose to make the wearing of mouthguards by players compulsory. Where this is the case, they should have a clear policy around checking whether a player may participate if they don't have one available.

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Headguards



Head guards (sometimes called scrum caps) can help to protect the head from cuts and abrasions, and prevent the development of cauliflower ears. Wearing headguards is sanctioned on the basis that they should not cause harm or injury to any player and meet World Rugby standards (see regulation 12). However, padded headgear has never been approved or marketed by World Rugby or the RFU to reduce the risk of concussion and there continues to be no conclusive evidence that wearing head guards reduces the chances of sustaining a concussion while playing or training.

Wearing a head guard should be the choice of the player/parent. While it can provide some protection (e.g. covering the ears) and confidence (e.g. when introducing players to contact); wearing protective equipment has also been found to change a player's behaviour, sometimes encouraging them to neglect technique, increasing their risk of injury, including concussion. It is, therefore, important that players are aware of the purpose of head guards and their limitations.

Shoulder Pads

Shoulder pads (also referred to as body armour) can help to reduce the impact of a tackle, by absorbing and dispersing the force. They do not increase the power of the tackler in any way.

Shoulder pads are approved by both WR and the RFU and, like all other wearable protective equipment worn during rugby activity, they should be World Rugby compliant (see regulation 12).

There are no mandates set by the RFU on making players wear any specific protective clothing; whether they are worn should be the decision of the player/parent. While they can provide some benefit (e.g. absorbing the force) and develop confidence (e.g. when introducing players to contact); wearing protective equipment can also give a player a false sense of security that can lead to reckless tackles and behaviour. It is important that players are aware of the purpose of shoulder pads (and other similar body armour products) and their limitations.



Breast Padding

Specifically designed shoulder pads that include additional breast padding for women are also available on the market. These are acceptable, providing the padding is incorporated as part of a garment where the padding covers the shoulder and/or collar bone and/or chest only. The padding should comprise of a soft/thin material which is compliant with WR regulation. Chest padding is not allowed for men.

Wearing any kind of protective equipment is no substitute for good coaching of safe and correct technique, and players being able to perform this effectively

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Shin Guards



World Rugby regulations list shin guards as a permitted additional item, with some restrictions. Shin guards should be worn under the socks, with the padding incorporated within non-rigid fabric, no part of the padding should be thicker than 0.5cm when compressed.

This means that some of the hard plastic football style shin pads may not be suitable for contact rugby. There are brands that specialise in rugby (e.g. Canterbury) with shin guards appropriate for rugby, as they use foam rather than hard plastic.

Face Masks

Due to the materials used in most protective face masks it is likely they will NOT meet the criteria set out in the WR regulations. There is detailed information that sets out the specifications for any additional items of clothing or protective equipment within WR regulation 12.

If a facemask is to be used the onus is on the manufacturer/retailer to confirm compliance to World Rugby regulations. However previous investigations into face masks have highlighted that something that is soft enough to comply with WR regulations is too soft to provide any significant protection.



In the event that a face mask is found to be appropriate and meets regulation, it is important to consider the long term welfare of the player in the first instance. It is highly recommended that an individual is fully recovered from any injury, or has had full medical clearance to play if they have a permanent condition that requires protection.

Other Protective Items



All clothing and wearable protective equipment worn during any rugby union activity should comply with World Rugby regulations. It is important that any other additional items of protective equipment considered for use during rugby activity, such as knee or ankle braces, meet the criteria set out in WR regulations and where appropriate, are tested and approved.

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Remember: Wearing any kind of protective equipment is no substitute for good coaching of safe and correct technique, and players being able to perform this effectively.

Banned Items of clothing

World Rugby Law 4.4 (<http://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=4.4>) sets out a number of items of clothing that are banned. A player must not wear any:

- Item that is contaminated by blood.
- Item that is sharp or abrasive (including studs/blades)
- Items containing buckles, clips, rings, hinges, zippers, screws, bolts or rigid material or projection not otherwise permitted.
- Jewellery such as rings or earrings.
- Gloves.
- Shorts with padding sewn into them.
- Other item which does not conform with World Rugby Specifications for such clothing (Regulation 12).
- Item that is normally permitted by Law, but, in the referee's opinion that is liable to cause injury to a player.
- Communication devices within that player's clothing or attached to the body.
- Additional item of clothing that does not conform to World Rugby Regulation 12.



For information on clothing and footwear and other player welfare related topics go to: www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe/guides-and-faqs/

Any questions about protective equipment and other player welfare related queries can be sent to rugbysafe@rfu.com or call 020 8831 7693.

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