



Our Position on Head-Contact for Under 18s

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WUMA understands the need to minimise risk to participants in combat sports while still providing a safe, realistic, and enjoyable training environment. We are committed to balancing safety with the valuable life skills, confidence, and fitness that martial arts training provides.

Our Policy

We do not allow full contact to the head for under 18s in classes or competitions. Our standard is **touch contact only**, with compulsory headguards, strict refereeing, and full safety equipment. Some WUMA Schools may train without head contact if they prefer.

Why We Keep Controlled Head Contact

Realistic Self-Defence

In real-life situations, an attacker may attack the head. Learning to defend against this in a safe, controlled environment is an essential life skill.

Progressive Skill Development

Gradual, well-supervised exposure teaches young martial artists how to protect themselves, improving safety when they reach adult levels of competition.

Lower Risk Than in the Past

Today's students spar and compete far less often than previous generations. With lighter contact and fewer events, the risk of repetitive injury is significantly reduced.

Safety Then and Now

Twenty to thirty years ago, all sparring was treated as full contact. Today, we have clear contact levels and instructors/referees can step in to prevent excessive force. This modern approach makes the sport significantly safer than it once was.

Balancing Risk and Reward

All sports carry some level of risk, including rugby, horse riding, and cycling. Parents still choose them for the benefits they bring. Martial arts is no different.



We manage risk responsibly, provide clear information, and ensure you can make an informed choice for your child. Participation in any contact sport, including martial arts, comes with inherent risks, and WUMA's role is to ensure those risks are managed responsibly while giving parents the knowledge they need to make informed decisions.

Education and Research

Current evidence shows that repetitive blows to the head, especially in full-contact combat sports, can increase the risk of concussion and, over time, contribute to longer-term brain injuries such as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). Some studies have even found short-term changes in memory and coordination immediately after sparring, though most of this research focuses on full-contact scenarios. There is little evidence that separates the risks of semi-contact or touch-contact sparring from full-contact, which is why WUMA supports further targeted research. This will help us understand the true level of risk and give parents clear, fact-based information to make informed decisions.

In short:

Our approach is more cautious than many other combat sports, including boxing, which allows full head contact for under 18s. WUMA's focus is on safety, skill development, and education, preparing young people to defend themselves while enjoying the benefits of martial arts in a safe and structured way.