



Safe Kids of St. Joseph County

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Gear Up Properly for Safe Winter Sports

Safe Kids St. Joseph County offers safety tips

January 18, 2008, South Bend, IN —More than a quarter million children each year are injured while participating in winter sports in the United States. Safe Kids St. Joseph County offers a few simple precautions: kids need to be dressed appropriately, take lessons, be actively supervised and stick to safe terrain. For many winter activities, protective headgear is also recommended.

"Kids should wear helmets when they ski," says Ron Melser, Safe Kids St. Joseph County coordinator. "Buy or rent a ski helmet that's certified by the Snell Memorial Foundation or ASTM International, and have an expert make sure it fits correctly so it won't come loose at a critical moment." According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), ski helmets could prevent or reduce the effects of 53 percent of the head injuries suffered by children under age 15 while skiing or snowboarding.

"Caregivers should wear ski helmets too - remember, your children learn safety habits by watching you," says Ron Melser.

Each year, children ages 0-14 years sustain nearly 52,000 injuries involving snowmobiles, sleds, snow skis or snowboards, including approximately 29,000 from skiing and snowboarding, 20,000 from sledding, and 660 from snowmobile accidents. "Kids under age 12 should wear a helmet while sledding," says Ron Melser, citing a position statement by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. "Don't go down a hill headfirst - sit up and face forward. Make sure there is a clear, safe path with adult supervision." A good sledding hill does not lead to a street, a body of water or a crowded gathering place. In addition, the CPSC reminds parents and kids to inspect sleds regularly for worn, damaged or loose parts that could break or snag at high speed.

"Children under age 6 should not be riding on a snowmobile, period, and nobody under age 16 should be driving one," says Ron Melser. "All snowmobile drivers and passengers should be wearing helmets designed for high-speed motor sports - a bike helmet isn't sufficient for a four-wheeled motorized vehicle that can go up to 90 miles per hour."

There is no consensus among experts about the need for helmets while ice-skating, but parents should keep in mind that beginners are likely to fall down a lot. Helmets are a must for ice hockey, along with mouth guards, kneepads and elbow, shoulder and shin protection. "Outside, skate only on ice that has been approved for skating by local authorities," says Ron Melser. "Teach kids how to protect themselves if they do fall through the ice: stretch their arms out wide and kick as if swimming, shout for help and try to crawl backward onto solid ice."

"Basic health and comfort precautions can go a long way in preventing injury," says Ron Melser. "Dress in layers. Wear sunscreen. Stay hydrated. Kids - or caregivers - who become distracted or irritable, or begin to hyperventilate, may be suffering from hypothermia or altitude sickness, or they may be too tired to participate safely in winter sports. They need to go indoors, rest and warm up."

In 2005, more than 49,000 children ages 5-14 were taken to emergency rooms for injuries resulting from winter sports, including approximately 29,000 from skiing and snowboarding, 20,000 from sledding and 660 from snowmobile accidents.

Related Link

For more information about winter sports safety, visit www.usa.safekids.org/

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