

Stopping ATV Injury to Children in Massachusetts: Facts from *Concerned Families for ATV Safety* and The Medical and Public Health Communities

All-Terrain Vehicles are a threat to the lives and health of children. What are the facts about ATV-caused child deaths and injuries? Can they be stopped?

The Facts About ATV Injury to Children

- Of more than 3,000 cases of ATV injury in Massachusetts in 2004-2005, nearly 1,000 (1/3 of cases) involved children 16 or younger.¹ This is similar to the national trend.²
- The average age of injured ATV riders 17 or younger admitted to a Massachusetts Level 1 trauma center was 13.3 years old (range 6-17). About one-third required surgery, 22% required ICU admission, and 2.6% died.³
- Nationally, ATV deaths have been on the increase. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, between 1982 and 2004 annual fatalities for all ages rose from a low of 29 to an estimated high (most recent data) of 767 in 2004. More than 7,000 ATV-related deaths were reported in that period.^{2,4}
- Non-fatal Injury Types: From 2001 through 2003, an estimated 108,724 children 15 years of age or younger were treated in hospital emergency rooms for nonfatal ATV injuries. In that period ATV-related injuries increased by 25%. Children aged younger than 5 years old were more likely to have facial injuries, while older children were more likely to sustain lower trunk and leg or foot injuries. Fractures were the most common diagnosis, accounting for 27% of ED visits and 45% of hospitalizations.⁵
- Fatal Injury Types: More than half the fatally-injured children in one study died from injuries other than head injuries, including spinal cord, upper and lower trunk injuries, and suffocation.⁶
- Younger children have a higher risk of injury. More than 40% of ATV-injured children required intensive care and 8% required inpatient rehabilitation after being hospitalized for severe, disabling wounds.^{6,7} The injury rate for children per 100 registered ATVs is about double that for adults – 3.41 vs. 1.71.⁷
- ATVs are inherently unstable. Even adults have trouble controlling them, especially in off-road terrain where ATV recreational use is promoted. For children, who lack maturity and coordination, ATV use is an invitation to loss of control, rollover or collision, and resulting severe or fatal injury.^{8,9}
- In a trauma center study of injured children in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, one in sixteen children in ATV crashes died.⁶

How Can ATV Injury to Children Be Stopped?

Just as the law in Massachusetts forbids children under 16 from operating automobiles, motor scooters or personal watercraft, it should also be applied to ATV use. Massachusetts children are legally permitted to operate ATVs, and they are the target of aggressive sales tactics by the ATV industry.

- Legislation is needed to unconditionally prohibit the use of ATVs by children under 16 in Massachusetts and other states. The National Children's Safety Network, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, and the American Academy of Pediatrics are among groups supporting such state laws. In Massachusetts, physicians and nurses who see and treat ATV injuries to children have urged the legislature to enact such a statute.¹¹
- It is hazardous to children to allow or endorse their use of ATVs under any circumstances. The Boy Scouts of America, which has been promoting the wellbeing of young men for a century, recognizes this. BSA rules ban the use of ATVs in all scouting activities, thus prohibiting these dangerous vehicles from being operated by young people ages 11-18 years old – the age range of Scout membership.¹⁰
- The ATV industry claims that by “training” children to operate ATVs “safely,” it can reduce the carnage. But the fact is that “training” programs and “child-sized ATVs” are simply another way of inducing children to ride ATVs - and for too many, to get horribly injured by them. The industry knows this, and it knows there is no research evidence that “training” kids to ride ATVs reduces deaths and injuries. Only separating children and ATVs can do that!

Children and All-Terrain Vehicles are a deadly combination. Stopping ATV manufacturers and dealers from promoting ATV use by children under 16 and enabling adults to prohibit such use is the only way to stop ATV injury to children.

For more information visit www.atvsafetynet.org

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