

ATVs are not child's play: Ontario's doctors

Children under fourteen should not operate ATVs

Toronto, Sept 2, 2009 – Ontario's doctors want the last long weekend of summer to be a safe one for all, but are sounding the alarm about children's use of All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs). In a report released today, the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) has found that ATVs pose a significant, but avoidable risk of injury and death to children.

"As physicians, we are seeing far too many children with serious injuries caused by the use of ATVs," said Dr. Suzanne Strasberg, President of the OMA. "Ontario's doctors firmly believe that there is nothing more important than protecting the health and safety of children in the province."

According to the most recent statistics:

- In 2004/05 there were nearly 3,000 people hospitalized as a result of ATV-related injuries;
- Of those that were hospitalized, 1/3 were aged 5 – 19;
- In 2005/06, 5,584 Ontarians went to the Emergency Department with an ATV-related injury; and
- From 1985-2007, 28% of total U.S. ATV-related fatalities were children under 16 years old and 12% were children younger than 12 years old. (Consumer Products Safety Commission)

The OMA report also shows that the increased risk for injury in children is due to their lack of physical and cognitive ability to operate ATVs. Research demonstrates that ATVs require considerable muscle strength, as well as proficient cognitive, motor and coordination skills, and experience in making split-second judgements; generally these skills are underdeveloped or critically lacking in children.

There are some existing restrictions on the use of ATVs by children in Ontario, but they alone do not sufficiently protect children in many settings in which these machines are used. In order to help significantly reduce the rate of ATV injuries in children, the OMA recommends:

- That children under the age of 14, not be permitted to operate All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) of any size within the province of Ontario;
- That youth aged 14 to 16 be permitted to ride only power-restricted vehicles that cannot exceed 30 km/hour;
- That the province ensure that any ATV legislation protecting children include provisions to ensure that this applies to public and private property;
- That ATV manufacturers respond to medical community concerns and voluntarily discontinue their marketing to children without waiting for legislative restrictions on such activity to be passed into law;
- That government approved helmets be compulsory for all ATV users.

"The risks and dangers that children face when they operate an ATV are overwhelming and can't be ignored any longer," said Brian Patterson, President of the Ontario Safety League. "That's why the Ontario Safety League fully supports the OMA's recommendations to strengthen existing ATV legislation and we hope to see swift implementation of these long overdue regulations."

"It is frightening that it is perfectly legal for a child as young as five to drive an ATV, on any field or path, at virtually any speed." Dr. Strasberg said. "That is why existing legislation in Ontario must be strengthened to help prevent avoidable ATV-related injuries and deaths among children."

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