The American National Association for the Education of Young Children (<http://www.naeyc.org>) produces a help sheet for parents called "When children imitate superheroes". Helpful advice offered includes "Point out the difference between movies, TV, and real life", and "talk about real heroes and heroines with children ... like Helen Keller and Martin Luther King Jr".

Keeping children safe is a very common theme in public health. From baby car seats to swimming pool fencing, legislation helps to prevent childhood morbidity and mortality. There is a huge array of safety adjuncts available in the open market, including a foam helmet aimed at minimising head injuries in normal toddlers learning to walk (<http://www.thud-guard.com>). However, nothing can replace good parental supervision. There is evidence that wearing safety equipment can lead to increased injury owing to the risk compensation effect,³ where a safely equipped person takes more risk because of a lower perceived risk of injury.

We note that all our cases were boys and supermen or spidermen. Commercial role models for girls are less likely to show risk-taking behaviour; for instance, none of the authors have ever experienced any "My Little Pony"-related injuries. It is also striking that four of five cases were spidermen, a situation which is likely to change in the near future with the imminent release (at the time of writing) of a new Superman movie. Although the merchandising bombardment is yet to be released, we anticipate a rush of injured supermen to come through our department in the next few months.

CONCLUSION

Children have an extraordinary ability to injure themselves and will find new ways to do so in the future. Parents, however, should be aware that a superhero costume can provoke perceived super-abilities which need special supervision.

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Authors' affiliations

Patrick Davies, Department of Paediatrics, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham, UK

Julia Surridge, Children's Emergency Department, Derby Children's Hospital, Derby, UK

Laura Hole, **Lisa Munro-Davies**, Emergency Department, Royal Bristol Children's Hospital, Bristol, UK

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Correspondence to: Dr P Davies, Department of Paediatrics, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham, UK

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IMAGES IN PAEDIATRICS.....

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Para-phenylenediamine allergy from a henna tattoo

A 10-year-old girl presented with an eczematous eruption after a family holiday in Goa. She had a henna tattoo on her right upper arm at the start of the holiday without any reaction. Two weeks later, before returning to the UK, she had further henna tattoos, one on each arm (fig 1).

Allergic contact dermatitis to para-phenylenediamine, an aniline derivative, is seen with increasing frequency in children. Para-phenylenediamine is mixed with henna to darken temporary henna tattoos.

In this patient, sensitisation occurred on initial exposure to the henna tattoo, with subsequent dermatitis occurring within 24 h of re-exposure.

Advice must be given to avoid para-phenylenediamine in henna tattoos and in black hair dye in the future.

Emily E G Davies, Sophie Grabczynska

Department of Dermatology, Amersham Hospital, Amersham, UK

Correspondence to: Dr E E G Davies, Department of Dermatology, Amersham Hospital, Whielden Street, Amersham HP7 0JD, UK; emilydavies@doctors.org.uk

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Figure 1 Henna tattoo on left upper arm.