Preventing injuries from all-terrain vehicles

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ABSTRACT

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are widely used in Canada for recreation, transportation and occupations such as farming. As motorized vehicles, they can be especially dangerous when used by children and young adolescents who lack the knowledge, physical size, strength, and cognitive and motor skills to operate them safely. The magnitude of injury risk to young riders is reflected in explicit vehicle manual warnings and the warning labels on current models, and evidenced by the significant number of paediatric hospitalizations and deaths due to ATV-related trauma. However, helmet use is far from universal among youth operators, and unsafe riding behaviours, such as driving unsupervised and/or driving with passengers, remain common. Despite industry warnings and public education that emphasize the importance of safety behaviours and the risks of significant injury to children and youth, ATV-related injuries and fatalities continue to occur. Until measures are taken that clearly effect substantial reductions in these injuries, restricting ridership by young operators, especially those younger than 16 years of age, is critical to reducing the burden of ATV-related trauma in children and youth. This document replaces a previous Canadian Paediatric Society position statement published in 2004.

Key Words: *All-terrain vehicles; Children; Injuries; Prevention; Youth*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the high risk of injuries to children and youth when operating ATVs, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends the following:

- Children and youth younger than 16 years of age should not operate an ATV. The lack of evidence that youth models reduce the risk of injury means this recommendation must apply to all vehicle sizes, including youth models.

For youth operators who are **at least** 16 years of age, as well as adults, the following recommendations are made:

- ATV operators should wear a government-certified helmet, eye protection, and protective clothing and footwear at all times.
- Operators of ATVs designed for single riders should **never** take on passengers.
- ATV drivers should not operate a vehicle after drinking alcohol or when potentially impaired by other substances.
- ATV drivers should complete an approved training course. Training should have both theoretical and practical components and include mandatory testing to pass the course. Postcourse evaluations should be instituted to ensure that training courses are producing safer riders.

Provinces and territories must harmonize and pass effective off-road vehicle legislation that mandates:

- a minimum operator age of **at least** 16 years,
- restricting passengers to the number for which the vehicle was designed,
- compulsory helmet use with no exemptions, and
- training courses, licensing and registration.

No jurisdiction in Canada currently reflects all of these recommendations.

In regions where ATVs provide one of the only means of transportation, such as Canada's remote and isolated communities, local education programs that convey their potential dangers to children and youth and that promote safer riding behaviours are essential. Community-based programs should include prohibiting ATV use as a form of recreation by children and youth.

For the ATV industry, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that:

- ATV manufacturers improve vehicle design and operating standards to address the large margin for driver error. Until the safety record is significantly improved for older youth and adult operators, consideration cannot be given to permit the marketing of any ATV model to youth younger than 16 years of age.
- ATV manufacturers be governed by mandatory and stringent product safety regulations and monitored by the federal government. More specifically, while the Canadian Paediatric Society does not support the use of youth-model ATVs by anyone under the age of 16, the fact that these vehicles are being marketed for use by children must make them subject to federal product safety regulations and monitoring, as for other children's products.

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