

Make Helmet Use a No-Brainer this Winter

Winter safety tips to keep your kids injury-free from Safe Kids Columbus

Columbus, GA – The cold weather during the holidays does little to keep winter sports enthusiasts inside – especially children. In fact, children ages 14 and under are at a high risk for winter sports injuries. In 2007, there were 17,000 estimated injuries among children from skiing and snowboarding; 24,500 estimated injuries from sledding; and 1,500 estimated injuries from snowmobiles and other equipment.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, ski helmets could prevent or reduce the effects of 50 percent of head injuries suffered by children under 15 while skiing or snowboarding. “Kids should always wear helmets when they ski, sled, snowboard, or play ice hockey,” says Christy Hubbard, Safe Kids Columbus coordinator. “But parents should know that there are different helmets for different activities. Make sure your child’s helmet meets federal safety standards, and have an expert check that the helmet fits correctly so it won’t come loose at a critical moment.”

Along with wearing a helmet while skiing or snowboarding, parents should know these ten useful tips to keep their children safe when doing outdoor activities this winter:

Sledding

- Kids can suffer serious head injuries from sledding, and should always wear a helmet. When sledding, do not go down a hill head-first. Sit up, face forward, use a clear, safe path and make sure an adult is supervising.
- A good sledding hill does not lead to a street, a body of water or a crowded gathering place. In addition, remember to inspect sleds regularly for worn, damaged or loose parts that could break or snag at high speed.

Snowmobiles

- Children under 6 should not be riding a snowmobile and no one under 16 should drive one. 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 motorcycle that can go up to 90 miles per hour.

Ice Skating and Hockey

- There is no consensus among experts about the need for helmets while ice skating, but parents should consider them for kids who are just beginning to learn to skate.
- Helmets are a must for ice hockey, along with mouth guards, knee pads and elbow, shoulder and shin protection.
- Teach kids how to protect themselves if they do fall through ice. Remind them to stretch their arms out wide and kick as if swimming, shout for help, and try to crawl backward onto solid ice.

General

- Always wear sport-specific, properly fitting safety gear when participating in winter sports activities. Since proper equipment fit and maintenance are important for safety, bring your child along when shopping for skates, helmets, boots, etc.
- Dress in layers and wear warm, close-fitting clothes. Make sure that long scarves are tucked in so they don’t get entangled in lifts, ski poles or other equipment.
- Stay hydrated and wear sunscreen with a rating of SPF 15 or higher.
- If children become distracted, irritable, or begins to hyperventilate, they may be suffering from hypothermia or altitude sickness, or are too tired to participate safely in winter sports. They should go indoors, rest and warm up.

“Remember, your children learn safety habits by watching you,” adds Hubbard. “So parents should always wear the right helmet for their winter activities too.”

For more information about sports safety, call (706) 321-6183 or visit www.safekidscolumbusga.com.

Safe Kids Columbus works to prevent accidental childhood injury, the leading killer of children 14 and under. Its members include public safety agencies, teachers, EMTs, county commissioners, health educators, nurses, civic groups, faith-based organizations, public health organizations, local government, and many others concerned about the well being of our children. Safe Kids Columbus is a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations dedicated to preventing accidental injury. Safe Kids Columbus was founded in 1998 and is led by the Columbus Health Department.