

One size does not fit all

ATV size important for youth safety

Would you give your son or daughter a powerful, full-size motorcycle to ride? No? According to industry insiders, that's what you are doing when you let them ride an average, all-terrain vehicle (ATV).

"First time buyers sometimes don't understand how big and powerful ATVs are," says Brent Hodgson, president of the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association. "They could become informed by attending one of our ATV safety presentations or going to our website at www.aohva.com for factual information before buying the right-sized ATV for their kids."

Between 2002 and 2009, 17 Albertans under 16 years of age died in ATV-related incidents. Males from 15 to 24 years of age had the highest rates of hospital admissions and emergency department visits, followed closely by boys from 10 to 14 years of age.

Surprisingly, the leading cause of ATV deaths among children/youth was rolls/flips on flat terrain. The second leading cause was collisions with other vehicles.

"It might seem odd that kids are dying after rolls or flips on flat terrain – we'd expect to see rolls on hills," says Kathy Belton, associate director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research. "But when you consider that most kids are riding adult-sized ATVs which are incredibly hard for them to control, it's no surprise at all. It's practically a recipe for disaster."

The Consumer Product Safety Commission in the United States found that nearly 90% of youth injured in ATV crashes were injured while driving an adult-sized ATV. The power and sheer size and weight of the machines make them harder to control.

"Kids are safest if they don't ride ATVs of any size. But if kids under 16 years old are going to ride ATVs they should only be riding machines made for their age, weight, and maturity," says Belton. "We urge parents to follow manufacturers' recommendations regarding the proper size machine for their children."

The Centre further recommends that parents make sure children and youth are always closely supervised by an adult. Young people have less strength, coordination and judgment than adults which means they need close supervision to monitor their speed and help them choose safe routes and deal with hazards.

"Riding with your children also allows you to model the safe and responsible use of ATVs, like wearing a properly fitted helmet and following the seating capacity of the ATV," says Belton. "It is a great way to demonstrate that you respect ATVs as a powerful vehicle or tool – not a toy."

More information about ATV safety is available on the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research website at www.acicr.ualberta.ca or by calling 780-492-6019.