



Health Sheet

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SUMMER SAFETY TIPS

with Ron Ruffing, MD

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SUMMER IS A TIME, ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN, to enjoy the beautiful weather playing and socializing outside. Whether they are participating in organized sports or playing in the yard, we must keep their safety in mind. Head injury prevention is critical. Serious injuries can be life-threatening or impair brain development. Make sure you err on the side of caution and keep in mind the advice of our expert, who has spent years getting children healthy again after injuries.

Ron Ruffing, MD, Director of the Pediatric Emergency Department at Floating Hospital for Children at Tufts Medical Center provides sound information parents can use to protect their children from summertime injuries.

DOCTOR'S NOTES

Pediatric Emergency Department

Floating Hospital for Children's Emergency Department, an excellent resource for parents, is located at 830 Washington Street between Chinatown and the Theatre District in Boston, MA. Most children are seen within 30 minutes of arrival and cared for by specially trained pediatric emergency physicians. This is much faster than many other Emergency Departments in the region.

What are the most common injuries for children?

The most common toddler injuries that I see in the emergency department are minor injuries to the head and face from simple falls at home. While these injuries are common, they rarely represent significant brain injuries. Children usually recover completely but may have a facial "scar" to document their injury and a lifelong story to tell of their trip to the emergency department for stitches.

More serious injuries occur from a fall greater than standing height or when the speed the child is traveling is greater than simple walking. Evolution designed a protective device (the skull) to prevent brain injuries under these circumstances. Once these limitations are exceeded, potential brain injuries frequently occur. Risk of significant brain injury, therefore, increases as one engages in activities that allow children to move faster than a simple walk or fall from greater than a standing height.

Head injury is the leading cause of death for children of all ages.

Even though many kids resist wearing helmets, why is it so important to insist they do when using a bike, skateboard, or rollerblades?

Any activity in which a child is at risk for striking their head at a speed greater than walking, or a height greater than standing, would benefit from protective equipment. Many of the current protective devices were not available when parents today were kids; therefore, the idea that an activity does not require a helmet because 'I didn't wear a helmet when I was a kid' is not a valid argument for parents nowadays. If a child is likely to strike their head and the child is traveling faster than a walk (roller blades, scooter, ice skates, roller skates, bicycle, skate board, etc.), parents should encourage the use of a helmet to protect the head from impact.

What precautions should parents of younger children take around the pool? For older children?

Adult supervision is required 100 percent of the time. It should seem obvious, but having a pool in your yard is the greatest risk factor associated with drowning. For older children (teenagers), alcohol and water don't mix well. A large percentage of adolescents involved in water related fatalities are using alcohol or drugs.

At what age do you generally see most head injuries or the worst head injuries?

The worst head injuries are those that occur in association with motor vehicle accidents. Safety seats and proper use of restraints is critical. Alcohol continues to play a major role in motor vehicle crashes. Don't drink and drive. Don't get into a car and let someone else drive you or your child while they are under the influence of alcohol. Wear proper restraints while riding as a passenger in a car.

Head injury is the leading cause of death for children of all ages. The majority of lethal injuries will be related to motor vehicle events (motor vehicle crashes, auto-bike and auto-pedestrian events)

Other Tips:

For children playing sports during the summer, proper equipment can be critical. Younger baseball players should use softer than normal baseballs, avoid sliding headfirst, and use helmets that include cage masks. In soccer, it is important to make sure the goal is anchored into the ground. Discourage children from hanging from the crossbar of goals to avoid the possibility of their tipping and causing serious injury.

Injuries can also occur on the playground. Nine inches of mulch or wood chips are recommended to keep children safe from falls. If a trampoline is present, do not allow flips that could put children in danger of landing on their head. It is recommended that children under six do not use full-size trampolines and that only one person use the trampoline at a time.

When the weather gets warm, open windows can be a hazard to young children. Install window guards to prevent children from falling out of open windows. Guards should be installed in children's bedrooms, parents' bedrooms and other rooms where young children spend time. Or, install window stops that prohibit windows from opening more than 4 inches. Whenever possible, open windows from the top - not the bottom. Also, keep furniture away from windows to discourage children from climbing near them. □



RESOURCES

For more summer safety tips, please visit:

http://www.stlukes-sf.sutterhealth.org/news/enews/0505_safety.html

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml02/02182.html>