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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Take the high road to snowmobile safety

Snowmobiles offer fun and excitement in snowy weather. To ensure your family's experience is a safe one, take precautions and follow state and local laws.

Children and adults alike enjoy gliding across frozen land on the motor-powered machines. However, snowmobiles can reach speeds of over 100 mph, making them dangerous for drivers and passengers.

The leading cause of injury and death from snowmobiles is from head trauma, which can occur when snowmobiles collide, fall or tip over.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all passengers and drivers wear safety helmets specifically designed for snowmobiles. Snowmobilers' helmets should be approved by Snell or another standards organization. Bicycle helmets should not be used.

Although children may be eager to drive a snowmobile on their own — and state laws may permit them to do so — the AAP advises against allowing youths to drive snowmobiles until they are at least 16 years old. Before letting teens drive snowmobiles, parents should check into whether their state requires drivers to have an operator's license or take certification courses. Some states also restrict young and newly licensed drivers to private land, daylight hours or designated trails.

In addition, children under age 6 should never travel as passengers on or behind snowmobiles, according to the AAP.

The AAP advises snowmobilers against carrying more than one passenger at a time. Children should never be



towed behind snowmobiles on a snow tube, saucer, skis or sled. The person being towed can run into objects, fall off, or be hit by a car or another snowmobile. If it is absolutely necessary to tow a person, the AAP recommends traveling at a low speed and over level terrain away from trees, rocks and other vehicles.

Finally, families should check weather conditions and visibility before heading out on a snowmobile. The AAP advises dressing in well-insulated protective clothing, including goggles, waterproof snowmobile suits, gloves and boots. Operators should carry a first aid kit, flares and a cellphone, and travel only on marked trails in groups of two or more.

Parents should model safe behavior by avoiding alcohol and other drugs before and during snowmobile use.

— Trisha Koriath

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