

Winter 2014



the

Voice

**Winter Sports and Brain
Injuries**

Recreational Inclusion

**Environmental Protection
Fund**

Equine Therapy

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Millions of people enjoy winter sports and recreation each year. The thrill, speed, adrenaline rush, fresh air and exercise are all wonderful reasons to participate in a variety of winter activities during the season. The opportunity to spend time with friends and family and build wonderful memories is something to cherish. Nevertheless, high speeds, thin ice, and slippery slopes can cause a variety of serious injuries making these memories ones you would soon like to forget. According to the US Consumer Product Safety Commission, there were more than 160,000 sledding, snow tubing, and tobogganing related injuries treated at the hospital emergency rooms, doctors' offices and clinics in 2007.

Traumatic brain injury is one injury that can be avoided or the severity can be lessened with the proper preventative measures put into place. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is the leading cause of death and disability in children and young adults. Mild traumatic brain injury (also known as concussion) is the most common form of brain injury. All concussions are serious and a person does not have to lose consciousness to have a concussion. A concussion can last for days, weeks or longer. According to the Centers for Disease Control, a concussion is a type of TBI caused by a bump, blow or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause the brain to bounce and/or twist in the skull, damaging brain cells and creating chemical changes in the brain. Our brain is everything that we are. It is so easy to take for granted the things we do each day. Our behavior, emotions, physical abilities, family life, careers and education can be forever adversely affected from a brain injury. Some of the symptoms of a brain injury are: headache, nausea, fatigue, feeling dazed or confused, trouble focusing, irritability and agitation, difficulty listening, attention problems and behavior changes.

The brain develops until around the mid-20's. Children are especially vulnerable to brain injury due to the fact their brains are still developing. Young children are vulnerable to injury due to their physical make up. Their heads are larger compared to the proportion of their bodies and are more prone to balance problems.

Wearing a helmet is one way to help protect the brain. It is important to educate the public about the risk of injuries from winter sports and how to lessen or avoid injury. Using protective equipment such as helmets, following safety rules, and taking precautions when a concussion occurs can reduce the incidence, severity and long-lasting undesirable health effects of brain injury.

Sledding, tubing and tobogganing are very popular winter sports enjoyed by children and adults alike. The majority of injuries happen at age 14 and younger. Some of the injuries can be serious enough to cause permanent disability or death. When a sled hits a fixed object such as a tree or rock, the rider may suffer head and neck injuries. Adult Supervision is needed to ensure the sledding path is safe and has no obstacles, and children don't collide with other children in the run outs at the end of the path. Protect your head: Everyone – not just children - should wear a helmet when sledding, skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, or snowmobiling to prevent brain injuries. While helmets do not eliminate all risk of injury, they can lessen the severity of a brain injury and can save lives. Sledding helmets are comparable to bicycle helmets, but are also designed to be waterproof and have a warm lining. The safest way to ride a sled is to sit in a forward-facing, feet first position. To decrease the chance of injury, avoid sledding downhill head first. Avoid sleds that are made out of thin plastic sheets; the safest sleds are equipped with runners and a steering mechanism. Always avoid sledding in crowded areas.

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Ice hockey is a fast paced exciting sport for players and spectators alike. Children as young as 4 years old can join a league. Learning the rules of the game, safe behavior and following league policies are necessary for a safe, fun game. A “no head hit” policy is essential and body checking is not recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics for players ages 15 and younger. Body checking is a defensive technique to try to separate an opponent from the puck. Concussions in hockey most often occur from a blow to the head, falls or from being checked into the boards. Of course, wearing properly fitting helmets and other safety gear will help protect from injury.

Ice skaters need to be aware of thin ice. Frozen ponds and lakes can have hidden soft spots. Children can sustain a brain injury after falling into freezing water from lack of oxygen after nearly drowning. Skates should be sharpened and be properly fitted. Indoor rinks or flooded yards are the safest options for skating.

A growing number of skiers and snow boarders are wearing helmets more than ever before. According to the 2012 NSAA National Demographic Study, 67% of skiers and snow boarders now wear helmets. Nearly 80% of children age 17 and younger are wearing helmets. A growing number of adults are wearing them as well. It is interesting to note that helmets are mandated for ice hockey and alpine ski racing

and other competitive sports but there are few state laws mandating the use of ski helmets. Studies show skiers who have sustained brain injuries that have worn a helmet have had better outcomes than those not wearing helmets. This may suggest the idea that helmet use should possibly be mandated.

In addition to wearing that all important helmet, some skiing and snowboarding tips include:

- Stay in control
- Take lessons if you are beginner
- Look out for others to avoid collision
- Keep a safe distance from others and obstacles such as trees
- Wear warm clothing
- Never ski alone
- Whenever possible, skiers and snow boarders should fall forward or sideways instead of backwards to decrease the chance of injury
- Keep a look out for icy patches and be prepared to make adjustments for ice, packed snow, and wet snow while on the slope

It is interesting to note that not all states have a helmet law for snowmobiling. New York State mandates that all snowmobilers wear a helmet. Here are some tips for safe snowmobiling:

- Always stay to the right on snowmobile trails, and stay on marked trails, away from roads, water, railroads and pedestrians.

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- Children under age 16 should not operate snowmobiles, and children under age 6 should never ride on snowmobiles.
- Never snowmobile alone or at night. Before heading out with a group, identify hand signals that can be used to communicate with others. It is critical not to return to the activity immediately following a concussion. If someone receives another concussion before the first one is resolved, more permanent brain injury can occur or even death.

As The Brain Injury Association of America's slogan states: Brain Injury: "Anytime, Anyone, Anywhere"... Brain Injuries do not discriminate. Taking proper precautions and being a good example to our kids and grandkids by wearing a helmet in any sport or recreational activity is one of the best forms of prevention!

Written By: Sharon Johnson, FACTS Coordinator,
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Winter Sports Injury Facts

Severe head trauma accounts for about 15 percent of all skiing- and snowboarding-related injuries, but is the most frequent cause of death and severe disability.

According to the National Ski Areas Association's (NSAA's) 2011 NSAA National Demographic Study, 61 percent of skiers and snowboarders now wear helmets while on the slopes at U.S. ski areas, up from 57 percent during the 2009-2010 season. Helmet usage among those interviewed nationwide has increased 140 percent since the 2002-2003 season, when only 25 percent of skiers and snowboarders were wearing a helmet at the time of being interviewed. More importantly, nearly 80 percent of children ages 17 and younger now wear helmets on the slopes. The NSAA National Demographic Study was compiled from more than 130,000 interviews of skiers and snowboarders nationwide over the course of the 2010-2011 season.

The NSAA Demographic survey also revealed that:

93 percent of children 9-years-old or younger wear ski/snowboard helmets.

79 percent of children between 10 and 14 wear ski/snowboard helmets.

73 percent of adults over the age of 65 wear ski/snowboard helmets.

Skiers and snowboarders ages 18 to 24 traditionally have represented the lowest percentage of helmet use among all age groups. This year, 48 percent of all 18- to 24-year-olds interviewed wore helmets, representing a 166-percent increase in usage for this age group since the 2002-2003 season, when only 18 percent wore helmets.

According to the 2008/09 NSAA National Demographic Study. Notably, helmet usage increases with the skier's ability level. Twenty-six percent of beginners wore helmets, and 38 percent of intermediates wore helmets, while 55 percent of advanced skiers and riders wore helmets.

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Helmets are PHaT

Protect Your Head at All Times!

Snow riders - both skiers and snowboarders - are running out of excuses for not wearing a helmet whenever on the slopes. New helmet designs and technology have produced lightweight, comfortable helmets that are both warm and well ventilated. A wide variety of styles are available, and as more and more pros utilize helmets they are becoming an accepted part of snow-riding equipment. Best of all they may help to protect you in an accident. Here are some tips you can share with parents and caregivers on how to fit and use a helmet.



Dr. Rob's Tips: General Advice on Helmet Use:

- Replacement of helmets is recommended every 5 years. The materials used in the helmet break down over time.
- Check children's helmets before each season. Children grow rapidly, so make sure the helmet is still fits properly.
- Helmets are made for single-impact ONLY! If you take a hard fall, replace it.
- Ski and snowboard as if you weren't wearing a helmet.
- All skiers and boarders should ride responsibly and in control at all times. Helmets may help prevent head injuries in the event of certain types of accidents, but if you're out of control, they cannot protect you in high-speed, head-on accidents.
- Use a helmet designed specifically for skiing or snowboarding. Each sport has its own type of impact and accidents.
- Buy a helmet that meets industry standards. There are various helmet standards in place including CEN - the least rigorous standard - ASTM and Snell - far and away the most rigorous and hard-to-meet standard for certification.
- Adults should serve as role models for children. This is an easy one. If you want children to wear a helmet, wear one yourself.

How to Fit a Helmet

Here are some guidelines for making sure a helmet fits properly:

- Place helmet on the head until the front edge extends down to about an inch from the top of the eyebrows.
- Make sure the helmet fits the head snugly from side to side and from front to back. In the event the helmet does not fit well, sizing pads can be used to make minor adjustments. Adjust the straps to ensure a custom-fit feel.
- When properly placed, the helmet should not easily "roll" forward or backward. It should not be removable without unbuckling the strap.
- Get a helmet that fits now. Don't plan on growing into it. Work with a knowledgeable salesperson at a reputable store regarding appropriate fit for a helmet and to answer your questions.
- Bring your goggles in when you buy your helmet. A well-fitting system will provide great protection for the face and forehead from cold wind and snow and still allow adequate ventilation for the goggles.

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