

ATV Safety

The decision to let youth ride on an ATV is complicated and there are many considerations that should be taken when making this decision. Safe Kids and the American Academy of Pediatrics, along with other safety experts, concur that children under the age of 16 should not be riding on an ATV. They do not have the cognitive skills to make good driving decisions and they often don't have the upper body strength to bring a tipping ATV to an upright position. While helmets are required by law for youth under age 18, we often see deaths and injuries occurring from crushing injuries from the weight of these vehicles. ATVs can weigh up to 800# and travel at speeds of up to 70 mph. The size and speed of these pieces of equipment can easily lead to injuries and deaths since there are no safety features on an ATV such as those found in a car (air bags, seat belts, rollover bars, etc.)

In the past, ATVs were used as farm utility vehicles, but in recent years, the popularity of them being used by youth to get to and from school or for recreational purposes has increased. Our finds are that most parents don't understand the danger that these vehicles pose. They allow use of them for kids that need to get places but who are not yet old enough for a driver's license. We share the recommendation of leading safety experts to not allow youth under the age of 16 to operate these vehicles so that parents and caregivers can weight those recommendations with the urge to allow use of them. Whether you have an ATV or your young ones are visiting the home of others that have these type of vehicles, the discussion about use should take place so kids have a good understanding of parental rules for use.

If youth are allowed to ride an ATV, here are some considerations and safety tips:

- As noted, ATVs are large pieces of equipment that are heavy and fast, weighing up to 800# and traveling at speeds up to 70 mph. They are prone to tipping when ridden on off-road terrain. Many times, the injuries and deaths occur from the operator being crushed from the weight of the machine. Youth should not only wear a helmet as required by law, but a chest protector to minimize crushing injuries.
- A helmet is a must!! Be sure to get one that fits properly (not one you buy and grow into). The helmet needs to be one certified for motorized sports (not a bike or multi-sport helmet). Other protective gear includes a face shield or goggles, closed toed shoes, long pants and sleeves and gloves.
- There should only be one person on the ATV at a time. Additional riders can cause the vehicle to sit in a position that is off balance, causing it to be likely to tip. While the seats are made in an elongated style, this is designed to allow the driver to move forward or back so as to adjust their weight as they travel on uneven terrain. The long seat (or the frame on the back) is not intended to add additional riders as this changes the center of gravity so it is not directly between the four wheels. Adding extra weight and people to the ATV changes the tipping dynamics and adds more weight for the driver to have to manipulate.
- If children under age 16 are going to be riding on an ATV, choose one that has a smaller engine size so as to limit the speed and weight of the vehicle.
- All ATV riders should take an ATV safety course. These are offered by the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The following information relates to the ND and MN law and the course requirements.

- **Minnesota:** In Minnesota, ATV operators born after July 1, 1987 and OHM riders under the age of 16 are required to complete an approved safety course before riding on public lands. ATVcourse.com is a delegated provider for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

North Dakota: North Dakota law requires youth ages 12-15 who do not have a valid driver's license or learner's permit to take a safety certification class. The certification is needed in order to legally operate OHVs on land other than their parents' or legal guardians', which includes designated OHV trails and highway right of way.

In order to become certified, the following guidelines must be met:

- Attend a free hands-on class in your area, or take the online certification course from home for a fee.
- Be at least 12 years of age.

NOTE: Children who are 11, but turn 12 within six months of a class date, may take the hands-on course, but will not receive their certification card until they turn 12.

OHV safety certification hands-on sessions are held May through August. The North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department offers the hands-on courses for free in an effort to increase OHV safety awareness and prevent accidents.

