

Safety Smart

Inline Skating Fact Sheet

In-line skating is becoming one of the most popular recreational sports. Unfortunately, the number of in-line skating related injuries has grown as well. About 1,000 kids a week go to the hospital to treat in-line skating injuries. Here are some things to know that will keep the sport fun and safe.

What are the most common in-line skating injuries?

Wrists injuries, (usually fractures), are the most common skating injuries. Arms and legs are the next most frequently hurt.

How do skating injuries happen?

Most result from loss of balance due to debris and rough riding surfaces. Other common causes are inability to stop, speeding to the point of losing control, and tricks. Most serious injuries and almost all deaths are the result of collisions with motor vehicles.

Who is at risk?

Anyone who skates must take into account the risks of the sport, but careful attention should be given to children and beginners. Young children have less developed motor coordination and less strength required by the sport. Additionally, kids have poorer ability to judge their ability and possible skating hazards. Novice skaters are vulnerable to accidents caused by a lack of basic skills, like the ability to stop, turn, and have moderate control over one's speed.

How do you prevent injuries?

Protective Gear is essential for safety. These items should include:

Helmet: The most serious injuries are always head injuries. While no research has been done specifically on in-line skating helmets, studies in other areas, (such as bicycle helmets, where riding conditions are similar to that of skating), have proven helmets to be highly protective against head injuries. Also, a few states require by law that skaters wear helmets. A helmet should always have a form of safety certification. Those designed for in-line skating, or for multiple sports including in-line skating, are best. If none of these designs are available, any certified helmet, such as a bike or in-line skating helmet, is better than no helmet.

- Helmets should be certified by either the American Society for Testing and Materials, (ASTM), or the Snell Memorial Foundation.
- Certification is always designated by either a sticker label found on the inside of a helmet, or a label on the outside box.

Wrist Guards: Wrists are the most common site of injury, mostly because they are used to brace falls. Recent studies show that wrist guards reduce these injuries by 87%. They also protect hands from serious scrapes and cuts.

Elbow and Knee Pads: Like wrist guards, elbow pads have been shown to cut elbow injuries by 82% and knee pads are found to reduce knee injuries by 32%. Both knee and elbow pads also prevent skin abrasion.

Buying the right skates is also important. There are different kinds of skates designed for different levels and types (long distance, speed, etc.), of skating. Make sure to buy a pair that is durable and matches your child's skill level as well as the kind of skating they'll be doing. Five-wheel and very low-friction skates are usually not safe for children.

Fit: Almost as important as using the gear is wearing it properly. Comfort, mobility and visibility should all be kept in mind while choosing equipment. Padding and helmets should be neither too loose or too tight: in an accident, loose equipment will fail to protect while gear that is fitted too tightly can create further injuries.

Getting your kid to wear protective gear may be a task. Try to emphasize common sense. Point out how experience may be a very painful thing to learn from; they shouldn't need to break something in order to know to wear padding. Understand that peer pressure may strongly influence your child's choice. A study shows that kids tend to wear helmets, or fail to wear them, in groups. If one child is wearing a helmet, there is an 85% chance the second child will too. If the first child does not wear a helmet, there is only a 3% chance that the second one will.⁴ Remind your child that it is not cool to have crippling injuries.

Basic Skills

Your child should know skills necessary for control to be safe and have fun. Skating classes are a good way to learn. *Common sense* is the best protector against injury. First and foremost, caution and judgement will help any rider avoid most accidents. Skating is a sport that inherently involves some risk, but knowing one's limits can make it reasonable and fun.

Help your child use *good judgement* about what they are able to do. Fancy tricks may be appealing to a child, and peer pressure may increase their interest in trying to perform them. Emphasize patience and perfecting of skills with new skaters.

Also make sure your child's *riding environment* is safe. Younger children under 16 should not be allowed to skate alone in the street, and no one should ever ride near traffic. Never skate after dark. Riding surfaces should be checked to make sure they are smooth and clear of debris. Skates should also be checked before riding to make sure that they are in proper working order.

Learning how to fall properly can also reduce a skater's risk of injury. Here are

some tips to teach a new rider:

- If you are losing your balance, bend your knees slightly to lower your center of gravity and keep balanced on the balls of your feet. You will also not have as far to fall.
- In a fall, try to land on the fleshy parts of your body.
- Try to land first on your knees, next on your elbows, then skid with your hands.
- If you fall, try to roll rather than absorb the force with your arms or any one part of your body.
- Even though it may be difficult during a fall try to relax your body rather than to go stiff.
- Practice falling on a soft surface or grass.

1. National Safe Kids Campaign, (www.safekids.org/fact99/sports99.html)
2. CPSC Factsheet on In-line skating, (www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/skates/pdf)
3. All protective gear study facts found in the AAP 1998 Policy Statement on In-line Skating Injuries in Children and Adolescents.
4. Injury Prevention Center, (<http://www.bikehelmet.org/ptcamp/ptwds.html>)