

Safety Smart

Skateboard Safety Fact Sheet

Skateboarding is a sport whose popularity has been increasing for a decade. Unfortunately, the number of skateboard related injuries has also been rising. About 300 kids a week go to the hospital to treat skateboard related injuries. Here are some things to know that will keep the sport fun and safe.

What are the most common skateboarding injuries?

Sprains, fractures, contusions and abrasions are the most frequent. 74% of reported injuries were of the extremities. Among these, broken wrists and ankles and long bone fractures are the most common injuries. Head injuries accounted for 21% of all injuries.

Who is the most likely to get hurt?

About 90% of skateboarders injured are male, and 60% are under 15 years of age. One third of all those hurt from skateboarding are riders with less than one week's experience, and the most commonly hurt are skaters who have over a year's experience.

How do most injuries happen?

Injuries almost always result from falls, which have causes differing according to the age and experience of the rider and the riding conditions. Accidental falls due to loss of balance are the most common. Underdeveloped motor coordination is the main cause of these falls in the younger and less experienced riders. In addition, the smaller the child, the higher their center of gravity due to the larger proportion of their head. Because of this balance, and the inability of less developed children to properly brace for a fall, head injuries account for a much higher portion of all injuries in skaters under 10 years of age.

About half of all falls result from rough riding surfaces. Small stones, sticks, bumps and holes in or on the riding surface are the leading cause of falls of experienced riders.

The most severe injuries are usually to the head and neck and are suffered by older riders as a result from collision with a motor vehicle. Deaths are almost exclusively due to auto-related accidents.

How do you avoid skateboarding accidents?

Due to the difficulty in testing skateboarding safety measures consistently and on a large scale, little hard data about preventative measures are known.

Common sense remains the best protector against injury. First and foremost, caution and judgement will help any rider avoid most accidents. Skateboarding is a sport that inherently involves 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 are a large part of the appeal of the sport, and peer pressure may increase a child's interest in trying to perform them. Emphasize patience and perfecting of skills with new riders.

Also make sure your child's *riding environment* is safe. Younger children under 15 should never be allowed to ride in the street, and no one should ever ride near traffic. Riding surfaces should be checked to make sure they are smooth and clear of debris. Boards and other equipment should also be checked before riding to make sure that they are in proper working order; on boards, look for cracks, loose parts, and properly attached gripping.

Learning how to fall properly can also reduce a rider's risk of injury.

Here are some tips to teach a new rider:

- If you are losing your balance, crouch down on the skateboard so that your center of gravity is lower and so that you will not have as far to fall.
- In a fall, try to land on the fleshy parts of your body.
- 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.

How do you avoid injury?

Protective gear is a good preventative measure against skateboarding injury. Most often it will not fully protect against fractures but will most likely reduce the severity of injuries significantly. Various padding is available for most parts of the body. The most fragile and most commonly injured areas are the most important to protect: heads, wrists, and other extremities. Wrist pads are especially recommended to avoid common injuries due to hyper-extension of the wrists that occurs in trying to break a fall.

Helmets: Helmets are very important and can reduce the risk of the most serious injuries. A helmet should always have a form of safety certification. Those designed for skateboarding, or for multiple sports including skateboarding, 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.

Fitting of protective gear is very important. 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.

In addition to padding, basic coverage is a good idea. Covered-toe shoes with good grip provide a safe base for the rider, and long sleeves and pants can protect against cuts and scrapes.

Getting your kid to wear protective gear may be a task. Again, 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.

1. Consumer Products Safety Commission, (<http://www.cpsc.gov/kids/moves.html>)
2. AAP 1995 policy statement on skateboard injuries.
3. CPSC, factsheet, publication #93, (http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/rec_sfy.html)
4. Injury Prevention Center, (<http://www.bikehelmet.org/ptcamp/ptwds.html>)