

## Protect Children from Scooter Injuries

For years, parents and children have been instructed about bicycle safety and the importance of wearing the appropriate protective gear. In fact, the use of a bicycle helmet is mandated by law for cyclists under the age of 14 in Connecticut, and similar helmet laws exist in many other states. Although bicycles undoubtedly will remain one of the most popular forms of transportation for young people, there has been a tremendous rise in the popularity of scooters during the last year and a half. In 1999, there were practically no sales of scooters in the United States. During 2000, over 5 million scooters were sold.

The increase in sales of scooters has resulted in a marked increase in pediatric injuries associated with the use of this toy. From January through mid-November of 2000, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimated there were more than 30,000 scooter-related injuries that required emergency room treatment. In the month of September, 2000 alone, there were approximately 1800 scooter injuries – it was the first time scooter injuries exceeded the number of injuries related to in-line skating. And 85-90% of scooter injuries occurred in children under the age of 15. There have been 2 known deaths attributed to scooter accidents.

Many experts believe scooters are at least as dangerous as bicycles. The small, low wheels (similar to in-line skates) attached to the lightweight aluminum frame, create a fast-moving vehicle that is difficult to control, especially on steep grades. Because of injuries resulting from scooter accidents, at least four communities in New Jersey, Washington, California, and North Carolina have passed scooter helmet laws, but in most places, including all communities in Connecticut, it is up to parents to make sure their children wear helmets when using their scooters.

The CPSC recommends the all scooter riders, especially children, wear proper safety gear, including helmets, knee pads, and elbow pads. This is the same safety gear recommended for use with in-line skates. Most recorded injuries occurred when the rider fell from the scooter. Fractures and dislocations, primarily to arms and hands, accounted for 29% of the injuries. The CPSC estimates that more than 60% of scooter injuries could have been prevented or considerably reduced if the users had worn the appropriate safety gear.

Parents and children need to be mindful of the following safety considerations in order to reduce the likelihood of accidents when using a scooter:

- Always wear a helmet and knee and elbow pads.
- Wear clothing that is loose enough to allow for freedom of movement, but not so baggy as to become entangled in the wheels.
- Do not ride a scooter barefoot or in sandals. Wear sturdy, flexible shoes.
- Check the stance of the rider. The feet should not be too

far back or forward. Both feet should stay on the board (except when pushing). Both hands should grip the handlebars firmly.

- Stay alert when riding a scooter. Do not assume others will look out for you, and watch for sudden surprises such as a car door opening or someone coming around a corner.
- Ride only on smooth, paved surfaces with no traffic. Scooters should not be near cars, and should not be used on surfaces with sand, water, gravel, bumps, cracks, or dirt and debris.
- Do not ride a scooter at night.
- Children under 8 years old should not ride a scooter at all, and children 10 and under should be supervised by an adult.
- Never ride faster than conditions allow. Avoid steep hills which allow the scooter to pick up speed that cannot be controlled.
- Become familiar with the scooter; get to know how to handle it, the speed it is capable of, and how to use the braking mechanism before riding.

At this time, helmets that have been specifically designed for scooter use are not available, but in-line skating helmets, multi-use helmets, and even bicycle helmets can all be used with scooters. The point that parents and children need to keep in mind is that the head needs to be protected in the event of a fall or a crash in order to avoid a head injury that may result in permanent disability or death. Helmets should meet the CPSC's standards for safety. The Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Rocky Hill, and Wethersfield, offers Snell and ANSI certified helmets for purchase by residents. Bicycle helmets and multi-sport helmets are available in a variety of colors for children and adults for \$10.00. To obtain further information about scooter safety or to purchase a helmet, call the health district at 721-2822.