



Feature Column

Towards A Healthier Arkansas

A Message from the Arkansas Department of Health

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Autumn Anyone?

(Little Rock) – As the colors of Fall unfurl here in Arkansas, the outdoors is calling folks who live here and bringing thousands of visitors from out of state to enjoy the season. Those who love outdoor activities like hiking, biking, camping, hunting and fishing, or just driving the colorful Arkansas highways agree that ours is a beautiful state. It's one of the many reasons we love it here, and participating in these activities is a part of a healthy lifestyle.

It's sad to say that recently we've seen a trend in the outdoors that has caused concern for those of us who monitor rising causes of hospitalization, injury and death. All-terrain vehicles (ATV's) are more popular than ever, and when operated safely, they can provide an excellent way to enjoy some parts of our state that are very hard to get to otherwise. Unfortunately, we have seen increasing numbers of injuries and deaths related to their use, with hospitalizations doubling recently in just four years (between 2002 and 2006.) What's worse, one of every four (71 out of 325) of the reported injuries were to those under the age of 15 during those years.

The leading cause of death for Arkansans 44 years of age and younger today is accidental injury. The Arkansas Department of Health will be focused on finding ways to help reduce the numbers of injury deaths and disability in the years to come, and a major component of that initiative will be preventing motor vehicle deaths and injuries.

Like other activities involving high speeds and heavy machinery, riding an ATV can be risky. To help stay safe, follow common sense safety tips. Take knowledge to the extreme and learn about these important tips for safer riding:

Take a hands-on safety training course. Formal training teaches drivers how to control ATVs in typical situations. Drivers with formal, hands-on training have a lower injury risk than drivers with no formal training.

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Always wear protective gear – especially a helmet – when riding ATVs. Many ATV injuries are head injuries. Wearing a helmet may reduce the severity of these injuries. Select a motorcycle or other motorized sports helmet and make sure the helmet is certified by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and/or the Snell Memorial Foundation. In addition, wear over-the-ankle boots, goggles, gloves, long pants, and a long-sleeved shirt to protect against cuts, abrasions, and other injuries from rocks, trees, and other debris.

Do not drive ATVs with a passenger or ride as a passenger. The majority of ATVs are designed to carry only one person. ATVs are designed for interactive riding – drivers must be able to shift their weight freely in all directions, depending on the situation and terrain. Interactive driving is critical to maintaining safe control of an ATV especially on varying terrain. Passengers can make it difficult for drivers to control the ATV.

Do not drive ATV's on paved roads. ATVs – because of how they are made – are difficult to control on paved roads. Collisions with cars and other vehicles also can be deadly. Many fatalities involving ATVs occur on paved roads.

Do not permit children to drive or ride adult ATVs. Nationwide, children are involved in about one-third of all ATV-related deaths and hospital emergency room injuries. Most of these deaths and injuries occur when a child is driving or riding on an adult ATV. Children under 16 on adult ATVs are twice as likely to be injured as those riding youth ATVs. According to Arkansas law, children under 12 may not operate an ATV unless with a person 18 or older, or on a parent's land, or with the permission of the land owner.

Do not drive ATVs while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Alcohol and drugs impair reaction time and judgment, two essential skills for safe ATV use.”

--Source: All-Terrain Vehicle Safety Institute, a not-for-profit division of the Specialty Vehicle Institute of America ATVSafety.gov/safetytips.html

By all means, get out and enjoy the Arkansas Autumn, but please, be safe!

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