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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Consider child's age before allowing them to drive ATVs

What's the difference between a 6-year-old in Tennessee and a 17-year-old in West Virginia? Only one of them can legally drive an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). And it's the 6-year-old.

While ATVs can be functional and fun, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges parents to remember that children who are not licensed to drive a car should not be allowed to operate off-road vehicles.

ATVs come in a wide range of shapes, sizes and power levels. Usually with three or four tires, the motorized cycles are designed for use on a variety of landscapes.

Today, 34 states have laws about the operation of ATVs. These regulations cover everything from how old the driver must be to helmet use, but vary greatly by state.

Yet even states with the most complete sets of rules report ATV-related deaths and injuries each year. About 3,000 children under age 16 have died in ATV accidents since 1982; 43% of those children were under age 12. Thousands more children have been injured.

With technological advances, ATVs are becoming bigger and faster. While this increases the vehicles' "thrill factor," it also creates the potential for more traumatic accidents. The most common types of ATV injuries are bumps, bruises and fractures, but more serious injuries also occur. Injuries to the spine and pelvis often result from rollovers. Concussions and other head injuries also are common, especially if the rider was not wearing a helmet.

The AAP advises parents who allow their child to ride an ATV to follow these safety measures:

- Make sure your child wears a motorcycle (not bicycle)-style helmet that fits snugly.
- Look for DOT or Snell ratings on the box. Never purchase a helmet that is too big for your child so he or she can "grow into it."
- Suit up your child with padded, reflective clothing and protective eyewear.
- Do not allow children to ride on the street or between dusk and dawn.
- Allow only one rider on the ATV at a time.
- Always supervise children on ATVs.
- If you are buying an ATV, choose one with a seat belt, roll-bar, engine covers and a speed-limiting device.

To find the laws about ATV use in your state, visit <http://bit.ly/1mH0eKl>.



— Mary McGrath

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