INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Helmets a must when skiing, snowboarding

Heading for the hills for some skiing or snowboarding? Insist that your child wears a helmet. Protective headgear is one of the most important things children (and adults) can wear to prevent serious injuries in fast-paced snow sports like downhill skiing or snowboarding.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advises all children and adolescents to wear helmets in snow sports. Some states have laws requiring people under age 18 to wear helmets for snow sports. Yours might be one of them, and for good reason.

Snow sports-related head injuries like concussions, fractures and other skull injuries are becoming more common among kids. They make up about one-fourth of injuries children and adolescents suffer when participating in snow sports, according to a recent study. Children and teens ages 7 to 17 years have the greatest risk of injury. Skiers often are injured after running into objects, such as trees and lift poles. Snowboarders are injured most often after falling. This is why snowboarders should wear wrist guards in addition to helmets, according to the AAP.

When choosing a helmet, select one designed for skiing and snowboarding. The helmet should be rated/labeled as ASTM F2040, CEN 1077, Snell RS-98 or S-98. This means it meets the required safety features for that activity. Wearing a helmet designed for another sport may not protect your child as well from a fall or blow to the head.

Your child should try on the helmet to make sure it fits properly. It should be comfortable but snug on the head. It should not tilt forward or backwards. When your child shakes his head from side to side or up and down, the helmet should not move.

Teaching children how to prevent injuries when skiing and snowboarding also makes a difference. Research shows that people who watch a video or are taught by an instructor have fewer injuries. Participants can learn safer ways to land if they fall, for example.

Finally, it is important to choose a location that is well lit, without obstacles like trees or roads. Avoid crowded slopes, but never ski or snowboard alone. It is safer and more fun to go with an adult or a buddy.

— Trisha Korioth