

Health Unit Media Release



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***"I Didn't Know"* campaign designed to educate parents about ATVs and the risks to children**

All parents want their children to be safe from harm. One risk that many are unaware of involves All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and children. **The "I Didn't Know" campaign is designed to educate parents about the risk of severe injury or death to children who drive or ride ATVs.**

Many children are injured and killed while riding as a passenger or operating an ATV. Children represent one-third of ATV related injuries and 50 per cent of ATV related deaths as reported by the Canadian Pediatric Society in 2004. **Each year in Ontario, 1,500 kids under the age of 16 visit emergency departments because of an ATV injury.** The major risks for youth riding ATVs include being thrown from the vehicle or having the vehicle roll over, often crushing them.

"Children and young adolescents lack the knowledge, physical size and strength, cognitive and motor skills to operate an ATV safely," says, Joanne Desormeaux, Public Health Nurse with the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit. "In many cases, the parents are simply not aware of the risks associated with ATVs and children under 16 who ride on or operate them. "

"I Didn't Know" is a campaign by the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit, in conjunction with the Eastern Region Injury Network (ERIN). ERIN is a regional injury prevention coalition comprised of several health units, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) and others working in the field of injury prevention.

Campaign materials include facts on how easily ATVs roll over; that they are not intended to take passengers, and that the machines weigh up to 800 lbs. Posters and information will be distributed at various locations throughout the region including workplaces, local businesses and arenas.

"We know ATVs are a way of life for farmers and other land owners. They do however, pose a danger to our children" says Desormeaux. **"Our hope is that this awareness campaign will help parents to make an informed decision. ATV riding is not child's play."**

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The following is an excerpt from a true story. Ten-year-old Kyle rode the family ATV across the neighbor's field to have an after-school snack with his friend. On his way home, the ATV he was riding hit a rut and tipped, suffocating him to death. Even though Kyle was a skilled rider and in full gear, he didn't have a chance. The 250 cc adult-sized ATV weighed 500 pounds and Kyle barely 80 pounds.

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"I got to the scene about 15 minutes after the incident happened and began to administer CPR," said Kyle's mom. "Holding my little boy in my arms, I felt the warmth drain out of his body. In a few horrible moments of breathing for him and tasting the cookies and milk on his breath, I came to the awful realization that I had been wrong to let him ride a full sized ATV. The memories of my son and the last time I held him will never go away."

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