

Position Statement on ATV Operation

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are a popular option within Alberta for work-related activities including agriculture, for transportation in rural and remote areas, as well as for outdoor recreational activities. However, traumatic ATV injuries, especially among children and youth, continue to negatively impact Albertans, their families and communities and place additional stressors on our provincial health system.

On June 30, 2009, Alberta Health Services (AHS) Medical Officers of Health released a Health and Safety Advisory entitled, *It's Time to Take ATV Safety Seriously*, and an organizational position on child/youth all-terrain vehicle (ATV) operators. The 2009 position has been revised to reflect the burden of ATV injury in Alberta, current evidence, positions taken by well-regarded professional health organizations, and the impact of ATV morbidity and mortality on Alberta families and communities. While this position focuses specifically on ATV operation, the need for a broader position statement that addresses recommendations for safe recreational, work and transportation practices for a variety of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) has also been identified.

While the AHS position statement continues to emphasize the original AHS position of no child/youth ATV operation under 16 yrs of age, it now includes four additional elements related to ATV safety. These are: helmet use, passenger restrictions, licensing/registration and training, and alcohol restrictions. In addition to recreational operation, it is recognized that ATVs are currently being operated by children and youth in rural and remote areas of Alberta for transportation and agriculture-related activities. Despite this reality, the high risk of severe injuries to children and youth in Alberta compels AHS to continue to recommend no operation of ATVs by children and youth under 16 years of age.

The intended audience for this position is AHS staff; however, the statement will also be shared externally with media, government departments, and transportation and health professionals in Alberta.

1. AHS recommends that children younger than 16 years of age do not operate any size of all-terrain vehicle

- Injury continues to be the leading cause of death for Alberta children and youth aged birth to 19 years (Alberta Health, 2012).
- Children/youth less than 16 years of age accounted for 20% of the ATV-related fatalities that occurred in Alberta from 2010 to 2013. From 2010 to 2014, 14% (532) of all ATV related hospital admissions and 26% (5,763) of all ATV-related emergency department visits were among children less than 16 years of age (AHS Surveillance and Reporting, April 2015).

- Some provincial stakeholders suggest that smaller-sized ATVs might reduce the risk of injury for children and youth. This appears to be in response to the current Alberta reality that many children under 16 use ATVs on a regular basis, especially in rural areas of the province. Some ATV industry and injury prevention stakeholders promote that children under age 16 can safely operate the smaller-sized ATVs that are appropriate for their age, weight and maturity and follow manufacturer's recommendations. This is not the position of AHS because there continues to be insufficient evidence that small-sized ATVs are safe for children less than 16 years of age. Although there is some evidence that bigger engines equate to greater risk for young operators (USCPSC, 1998; USCPSC, 2005), this does not necessarily mean that smaller engines equate to an acceptable level of risk for children/youth.
- The Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) researched the issue of ATV safety for children and concluded that ATVs are "especially dangerous when used by children and young adolescents because they lack the knowledge, physical size and strength, and cognitive and motor skills to operate them safely" (CPS, 2011). CPS released a position statement in 2004 that children younger than 16 years of age should not operate all-terrain vehicles (CPS, 2004); the organization reaffirmed this statement in 2011 as evidence continues to indicate that ATV's, including youth models, are highly dangerous for any person younger than 16.
- The Canadian Association of Pediatric Surgeons' (CAPS) position statement includes the recommendation that "children younger than 16 years should not operate ATVs, anytime, anywhere, any size" and that "ATVs can no longer be considered a safe recreational activity for any child younger than 16 years" (TCCAPS, 2008).
- Parachute, Canada's leading injury prevention organization is consistent with the CPS and CAPS on their stance toward ATV operation, stating that "children under 16 should not use an ATV, regardless of its size or the power of its engine" (Parachute, n.d.).
- The Public Health Agency of Canada also states that no person under the age of 16 should operate an ATV, citing inadequate physical and cognitive development required for safe operation as its rationale (PHAC, 2012).

For youth operators who are at least 16 years of age, as well as adults, AHS recommends the following:

2. Helmets meeting the standards for motorcycle use are required for all ATV users

- In 2009, 52% of ATV injuries recorded in the Alberta Trauma Registry occurred in individuals not wearing a helmet at the time of their injury and 60 per cent of those with major trauma were not wearing a helmet at the time of their injury (Alberta Health Services, 2009)

- In 2013, the average direct cost of a hospital admission for ATV injuries with a head injury was 38% higher than those without a head injury (Alberta Health, 2015)
- In 2013, the average direct cost of an ambulatory care visit for ATV injuries involving a head injury was \$1,300, while the average cost of those not involving a head injury was \$590 (Alberta Health, 2015)
- The PHAC recommends that all ATV riders wear a helmet that is up to standards for motorcycle use (PHAC, 2012)
- The CPS and the CAPS recommend that all ATV operators wear a government certified helmet (CPS, 2012; CAPS, 2008)

3. No passengers on ATVs designed for one rider

- The PHAC notes that the majority of ATVs are designed for one person and recommends that operators refuse to carry a passenger on them because they can affect balance and control of the vehicle (PHAC, 2012)
- CPS and CAPS state that Operators of ATVs designed for single riders should never take on passengers (CPS, 2012; CAPS, 2008)

4. Certified training and registration is required

- The PHAC recommends that riders complete an ATV training program with a qualified instructor (PHAC, 2012)
- The CPS states that ATV drivers should complete a training course with theoretical and practical components (CPS, 2012)
- While evidence does not consistently demonstrate that training results in reduced injury, the CAPS recommends the completion of an approved training course to mitigate injury risks (CAPS, 2008)

5. No consumption of alcohol or other impairing drugs (zero tolerance) by ATV operators, including prescription and over-the-counter, prior to or during ATV operation

- Between 2002 and 2013, 55% of those who died in ATV incidents and were tested for alcohol, tested positive (IPC, 2015)
- In 2012, Alberta implemented tougher sanctions for drivers of motor vehicles - graduated drivers license (GDL) drivers as well as for drivers with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of both .05 and drivers with a BAC of .08 (AB Transportation, 2012)

- The CPS and the CAPS both state that nobody should operate an ATV after consuming alcohol or other substances. (CPS, 2012; CAPS, 2008)

In order to advance ATV safety, AHS will:

- Continue to monitor evidence in Alberta and other jurisdictions regarding ATV safety and to gather additional data to inform recommendations regarding safe use for work, transportation and recreation purposes (for example, the Ontario Medical Association has recently developed recommendations for ATV use for 14-18 yr olds).
- Advocate for evidence-informed legislation that supports a safer environment for ATV use in Alberta including provisions for age restrictions, for addressing both public and private property, and that identifies ways to enforce ATV driver age restrictions;
- Advocate for improved engineering and safe operation of ATVs with manufacturers and retailers;
- Collaborate with key stakeholders to advocate for the most effective means to enforce legislation;
- Continue to provide health care professionals with the tools and resources necessary to educate Albertans about the risk of ATV use and how to reduce those risks.

References:

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