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## PRESS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### Risky Ride

*What riders don't know about ATV safety could cost a life.*

They look like tons of fun and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are often used for recreation purposes. But whether you're riding an ATV on a park trail or making your way across the farm, there's much more going on during your ride than you might imagine.

University of Iowa Pediatrician and Clinical Professor of Emergency Medicine, Dr. Charles Jennissen, has studied the design and technical aspects of ATVs since losing a cousin in a fatal crash. What he's learned about the way ATV design differs from automobiles and how ATV tires operate on various terrains is something everyone – adults and children – should be aware of.

"I believe the potential danger of ATVs is underestimated by many riders and very often by the parents of children who ride them," Jennissen says. "In focus groups we've conducted, parents often talked about how other families and their children needed to operate ATVs more safely to avoid injuries. There seems to be a widespread perception that someone else or someone else's child may be injured on an ATV. But not me, not my child."

Other studies have shown that out of 15,000 Iowa children surveyed, 78% had ridden on an ATV at least once. Of those children, 57% reported having been in some type of ATV crash.

"Frequent ATV users almost always have a crash history," Jennissen says. "Many times the crash is nothing serious. There's a rollover or the rider is ejected after colliding with something, but nothing really bad happens. For kids, that may not always be a good thing because the lesson they often take away is not that they need to ride more safely, but that they had an ATV

crash and didn't get seriously injured so they don't have to worry about operating it more safely in the future."

Guidelines for youth operating ATVs is still debated, even though the American Academy of Pediatrics has issued guidelines stating that it's not recommended that children under the age of 16 to operate an ATV.

"Most kids aren't riding ATVs with proper safety precautions," Jennissen says. "In vehicle parks, safety behaviors are often better because of park rules and riders being regulated by Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officers. But the only ones who can enforce safety at home or on farms are parents or employers. Often, that's not being done."

One of the issues surrounding youth on ATVs is the size and power of the machines they ride. Research shows that, most of the time, children are operating adult-sized ATVs designed for riders that are 16 years of age or older. Youth-sized ATVs are limited to maximum speeds of 15 mph for those 6 years and older and no greater than 30 mph for models marketed for those both 10 years and 12 years and older. Almost all adult-sized ATVs operated by youth are capable of reaching speeds of 45 mph or greater.

"The appropriate speed ranges of ATVs and the amount of risk from how fast operators are driving them hasn't really been effectively studied," Jennissen says. "However, in a study we did looking at University of Iowa patients, the risk of head injury was greater for those traveling more than 20 mph, and the danger even more pronounced for those going over 30 mph. No adult-sized ATVs have factory installed speed limiters, but youth-sized models do. Unfortunately, most kids are more adept at changing the limiters than adults are. It's not difficult at all for a child to adjust the limiter to a faster speed and set it back at a lower speed before parents can check it."

About 60% of all deaths related to ATVs occur on roadways, where the machines were never designed to operate. What riders are usually unaware of is the differences in an ATV and an automobile's center of gravity, the way ATVs are made to grip the terrain they're on and how the tires operate independently to grip the road.

"ATVs have a relatively high center of gravity, which makes them fairly top heavy," Jennissen says. "The narrow track of the machine makes it prone to tipping and rolling over as well. Because ATV wheels are made to grab the terrain, they can have unpredictable interactions with the roadway, leading to rollovers and unexplained crashes. If you have a small distribution in the weight of the rider, one tire can grab more than the others and quickly and inexplicably lead to a crash."

Due to their design, ATVs also require a greater turning radius than an automobile making it easy to misjudge the speed needed to safely negotiate a curve or turn.

Jennissen is disappointed that a recent trend in Iowa county legislation is to approve the recreational use of ATVs on public roadways, especially county roads. He says a lack of understanding about the design of the machines and the manufacturer's warnings that they should not be used on roads could easily lead to increased rider injury and death.

"I can understand that ATVs may need to be used on roadways at times for work purposes, but farmers should avoid using public roadways whenever they can," Jennissen says. Iowa law allows ATVs on roads for agricultural purposes but riders must possess a valid license and travel at less than 35mph. They are also required to have a fluorescent orange safety flag on the back of the ATV and drive on the road only between sunrise and sunset.

Jennissen also promotes the purchase of either yellow or orange ATVs, saying the color makes the vehicle much more visible wherever it's used.

"It's crazy to buy a camouflage vehicle if you're using an ATV for farm work on the road or for hunting," he says. "You want to be as visible as possible anytime you're riding an ATV. Riders should also be aware that the large size of today's ATVs adds much more risk of death in a rollover because the rider isn't likely to be able to move the machine if they end up under it. They will die of asphyxiation. Use of helmets is highly recommended and anyone using an ATV to spray should be very careful whether they're pulling a spray tank or have it loaded on the ATV. Any shift in that liquid product can quickly put the rider in a tenuous situation."

Information about ATV rider training is available online at the ATV Rider Safety Institute's website: <http://www.atvsafety.org/RiderTraining.aspx>..