

2021

PRESS RELEASE

For More Information:

ELLEN G. DUYSEN

Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health

University of Nebraska Medical Center

College of Public Health, Room 3035

984388 Nebraska Medical Center

Omaha, NE 68198-4388

402.552.3394

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*By UNMC, Central States Center for Agricultural
Safety and Health, Omaha, NE*

ATV ACCIDENTS

Neither age nor experience makes riders immune to ATV accidents.

Believe it or not, the rates for Nebraska's ATV (all-terrain-vehicle) accidents in the 55-64 age bracket closely mirrors the rate found in ATV riders who are between 10 and 15 years of age.

University of Nebraska Extension Educator – Rural Health, Wellness and Safety, Susan Harris, says the statistics surprised her at first.

"Statistics show that 60% of Nebraska's ATV accidents involving men and women occur in riders between the ages of 10 and 15 years old," Harris says. "For guys, it keeps going up but sharply declines at age 34. However, beyond 55, the accident rate goes right back up to match the youth level."

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, between 2015 and 2017 there were 1,697 deaths associated with ATV use and an average of 104,000 emergency room visits each year

In her research, Harris finds that youth lack the maturity to operate an ATV in a highly safe manner, and that they commonly attempt to ride an adult-sized machine. These facts account for the large number of ATV accidents in riders under 16 years of age. In contrast, ATV riders over the age of 55 lose the ability to react quickly, experience decreased vision and succumb to complacency in many instances.

"One more reason for the high numbers around age 55 is that, overall, there are more farmers and ranchers in that age group and they might be using ATVs for work," Harris says. "The accident rates drop off after age 65 due to retirement and declining ATV use."

Surveys of companies with employees who use ATVs in the workplace reveals that, often, employees do not receive formal ATV safety training. In implementing training programs for

companies, Harris finds that details about an ATV's unique center of gravity (CG) and how CG affects riding safety are frequently new information to both employers and employees.

As with any vehicle, when making a turn or traveling up an incline, the momentum of the vehicle creates a load transfer. The body weight of the rider and the weight of the machine will shift during the turn. ATVs have a much narrower wheelbase than a car, so a turn or incline that a car/pickup might easily maneuver, may result in a rollover with an ATV as the center of gravity shifts more quickly. When the center of gravity can't compensate for the shift, a rollover can occur.

ATV riders will find their machine's shifting throughout the ride in relation to the terrain where they ride and conditions such as rain, snow, mud, etc. While an ATVs light weight in combination with oversized, deep tread, and low-pressure tires enhance their maneuverability, those same characteristics increase rollover risks (in comparison to cars and trucks) because an ATV has a high center of gravity and relatively narrow wheelbase.

"There are four important things to know when you're riding an ATV," Harris says. "Always wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), make sure the ATV is the appropriate size for the rider (especially for youth), never drive an ATV on a gravel or paved road and never allow a passenger on the ATV."

Appropriate PPE for ATV riders of any age includes a helmet, eye-protection, long pants and sturdy boots. Without this gear, riders who experience an accident are vulnerable to serious and/or life-threatening injuries.

In terms of ATV size, it isn't the physical height, weight, and width of a machine that's so critical. The volume of the engine and the power it provides to the rider can lead to driving too fast or operating beyond the driver's ability. Youth ATVs are smaller and lighter weight than an adult version.

In contrast to car tires, which are completely on the road at all times, an ATV tire is knobby and has low-pressure. In combination with the ATVs narrow wheelbase and high CG, operating an ATV on either gravel or pavement makes them prone to rollovers or loss of control at roadway speeds. More than half of fatal single-ATV accidents on roads involve rollovers (Insurance Institute of Highway Safety).

"Never carry a passenger on an ATV that's designed for one passenger," Harris says. "Doing so greatly increases the risk of rollover. My new motto is 'No roads – No loads.' Driving an ATV on any Nebraska road is illegal, unless it's for agricultural purposes, and ATVs simply weren't designed to be used in this way."

It was in the early 1980s that ATVs were first used in the U.S. for agricultural purposes. Since that time, more than 10,000,000 are used in agricultural settings, making the knowledge and implementation of safety practices extremely important

Employers who have workers using ATVs, should provide thorough safety training and regular safety reviews. PPE should be required, and written operating and maintenance policies should be available and enforced. Whenever necessary, hazards such as excavations, trenches, guy wires, etc. that are present in the work area should be identified and marked so they are readily visible to workers.

Prior to using an ATV, riders should inspect tires, brakes, headlights, etc. to ensure the machine is in proper working order. Whenever hauling or towing with an ATV, never exceed the

manufacturer's capacity or weight limits. Ensure cargo is balanced, secured, and loaded on appropriate towing equipment.

Riders should be aware of trees, ruts, rocks, streams, gullies, etc. that they may encounter while using the ATV. Whenever appropriate, post hazard warning signs to alert riders to these hazards.

Driving speed should be adjusted to account for road and/or weather conditions and should never exceed manufacturer's speed guidelines. No one should ever operate an ATV while they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Harris heard from one employer who implemented a requirement for using helmets during ATV use. Riders had to enter a building to obtain a helmet, which resulted in reduced ATV use when employees chose to walk instead of using the ATV.

"The employees were healthier, and the workplace was safer because of this policy," Harris says.

"Don't expect your age and experience to protect you from the hazards of riding an ATV," Harris adds. "Adults usually don't know much more about ATV safety than youth and statistics prove that complacency can lead to tragedy. Know how to stay safe and always use those practices."

Funding for this educational article comes from the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.