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## PRESS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

It may appear to be like a toy, but the power found in ATVs (all terrain vehicles) can quickly turn deadly when they are misused.

In 2016, the Nebraska department of Health & Human Services documented 578 hospital emergency room visits due to ATV incidents. Nationally, between 1982 and 2016, 44% of child fatalities related to ATV incidents were children age 12 and under.

“Education for awareness of safe behaviors related to ATV use is lifesaving for all ages,” Susan Harris, University of Nebraska Extension Educator – Rural Health, Wellness and Safety, says.

Through Nebraska Extension, Harris offers a program to promote ATV awareness and safety for both owners and riders. Part of the program is a custom-made simulator that mimics actual ATV riding experiences to help participants learn about safe riding behaviors and laws.

“The four specific safety practices for using ATVs include age appropriateness, helmet use, keep them off paved and gravel roads and never have more than one rider on an ATV,” Harris says.

“Learn as much as you can about how to use an ATV before you or child operate one.”

It’s not uncommon to see youth operate an ATV. This is risky because young people are often not physically tall or large enough to safely reach gas pedals and handlebars and don’t have the maturity to appropriately respond to unexpected circumstances.

“There are smaller ATVs designed for youth,” Harris says. “However, many parents allow their children to ride full size machines. Sobering statistics tell us that of all children under 16 who were injured in an ATV accident, 97% of them were on an adult size ATV.”

Nebraska laws require that anyone operating an adult size ATV must have a driver’s license. For on-farm use, ATV operators should be at least 16 years old.

ATV injury statistics also reveal that the majority of injuries sustained in an ATV accident involve the operator’s shoulders, neck, and head. Some parents are diligent about requiring use of helmets for young drivers. However, the majority of adults operating an ATV don’t wear a helmet.

“We don’t stop using seat belts when we get older, so why wouldn’t we use a helmet when we operate an ATV?” Harris says.

When it comes to design, ATVs were intended to be used on unpaved surfaces. Their narrow wheelbase and light weight contribute to their speed. Those same characteristics play a significant role in the risk that occurs when operators drive them on paved surfaces.

“ATV tires have very low air pressure, between 13 and 15 psi (pressure per square inch),” Harris says. “They have deep tread designed to dig through mud and gain traction. On a paved road, these characteristics cause them to grab the pavement too aggressively and flip the machine.”

Some ATV models are designed for two riders and can be identified by the manufacturer’s extra seat built in as part of the vehicle. However, any ATV bearing a sticker that indicates two riders are not allowed should be operated and ridden by one person alone.

Youth struggle to resist the urge to speed when riding an ATV. While the machines can reach high speeds, operating them in that manner poses many risks.

“The University of Iowa had a similar simulator,” Harris says. “It uses hydraulics to control movement as someone is on it. The intent is to help riders, especially youth, to learn how to use their body weight to maintain balance and keep the machine from tipping.”

Workshop presentations are available in Nebraska and the surrounding states. There is no fee for presentations conducted in Nebraska without use of the simulator. For details, contact Susan Harris, Educator, Rural Health, Wellness and Safety, UNL Extension, PO Box 31, Minden, NE 68959. She can also be reached at [susan.harris@unl.edu](mailto:susan.harris@unl.edu) or by calling 308-832-0645.

“We can customize presentations for outdoor or indoor public events, as well as programs for schools, organizations, clubs or businesses,” Harris says.

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