



# Keeping Children Safe in Summer: Prevention Is the Best Medicine

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Summer vacation often means a desired break from school routine and weather-induced indoor confinement. It also relieves children of feeling the “heat” of academic expectations and performing well. Unfortunately, children often experience another kind of “break”—broken heads and bones from outside play with bicycles and scooters—and another form of “heat”—too much sun exposure on unprotected skin. To lessen the risk of unwanted “breaks” and too much “heat” from the sun, there are four vital things parents that can do.

- **Insist that children *always* wear helmets when riding bikes or scooters.**

**Why?** According to government statistics, head injuries from bicycle falls and run-ins with cars are major causes of emergency room visits and deaths for bike riders of all ages. Bicycle accidents and deaths from these accidents are much more likely to occur in summer, in the late afternoon and evening hours, and particularly on Fridays. Boys are more likely than girls to have fatal accidents, with the highest death rates occurring among 12- to 14-year-olds. Children in this age group tend to travel further distances from home, have more unsupervised time, are physically stronger, and are often willing to take more risks. Similarly, as scooters (motorized and unmotorized) become more popular, injuries and deaths from falls and collisions with cars are rising. Using helmets and other protective gear (such as gloves for biking and knee and elbow pads with scooters and rollerblades) significantly reduces the risk of brain injury, fractures, scrapes, and facial trauma. To avoid unwanted injuries during summer break, insist that your children *always* wear helmets and protective gear when riding, regardless of the distance they are traveling.

- **Do not allow children under 12 years of age to ride motorized scooters.**

**Why?** Motorized scooters have been responsible for the deaths of children who have fallen off of them or been hit by motor vehicles while riding them. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that children under 12 years not be permitted to ride motorized scooters.

- **Regularly review street safety with children.**

**Why?** Children are continually maturing and developing new skills. They take on new challenges and experiment with new behaviors all the time. Younger children may be content to ride on sidewalks or on protected streets where they know the safety rules appropriate to the environment. But as they age, they want to explore farther and farther away from home, to ride on less familiar streets, and often to take more risks. Thus, it's important to review street safety on a regular basis with your children. Ask them what they do to keep safe while riding, then clearly identify what you expect, reinforce correct behaviors, and correct unsafe practices. Build awareness and understanding of safe riding behavior by role playing with them to practice what to do when encountering various traffic hazards.

- **Avoid overexposure to sun by having children wear hats and sunscreen and by limiting their outside time during the middle of the day (10 a.m.–2 p.m.).**

**Why?** Children's skin is especially sensitive to the burning effects of the sun. Unprotected sun exposure can cause burns, as well as cataracts and skin cancer later in life.