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Taking precautions with winter activities

(Anchorage, AK) — With winter underway in Alaska, health officials would like to remind Alaskans that winter activities can be dangerous.

According to the Alaska Trauma Registry, each year between 2004 and 2007, an average of 24 Alaska children under age 15 were admitted to a hospital due to injuries received from sledding, snowmachining, or skiing. Since January 2004, at least 11 Alaska children under age 18 have died from injuries sustained while sledding or snowmachining.

Sledding injuries most often involve trauma to the head or neck, and serious injuries can occur if a rider collides with an object like a tree or car. Snowmachine-related injuries can be the result of driving out of control or falling through the ice. Helmets are recommended for both activities to reduce the severity of injury if a crash occurs.

“We want to stop a moment and remind everyone to practice safety when out in the snow,” said Hillary Strayer, Senior Injury Prevention Specialist with Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. “Following some simple guidelines can help avoid trauma and heartache.”

Tips for safer snowmachining include: never letting a child drive a snowmachine that is too big for him or her to handle; staying on marked trails and away from areas with open water; not going too fast for conditions; putting reflective tape on jackets or gear to increase visibility to others; and always wearing a helmet.

Tips for safer sledding include: avoiding hills with obstacles, icy conditions, jumps or proximity to roads and parking lots; making sure children will glide to a stop before reaching any hazards; choosing a steerable sled; not sledding when visibility is poor (late afternoon darkness or bad weather conditions); and making sure your child wears a helmet.

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