

Wheels are always a favourite as gifts for children at birthdays or Christmas. Tricycles, bicycles, skateboards, in-line skates (roller blades) and scooters are the most common wheeled gifts. These are a great form of exercise, provide hours of entertainment, and help to develop skills such as balance. There is however a risk of injury to children when using wheeled products. Following some general guidelines for their use, and ensuring children always use safety gear can lower the risk of serious injury to your child.

OVERVIEW OF PRODUCTS

Tricycles

Tricycles should be the right size for the child, and need to be stable. The child will need to have a safe area, free of slopes, stairs and level changes, in which to ride the tricycle.

Bicycles

The Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit reports that over 2003-2005, children aged between 10 and 14 accounted for 60% of all hospital admissions for bicycle related injuries, and children under five accounted for 10%¹. The majority of these injuries are simply a result of the child losing control of the bike and falling. A bike must be the right size for the child to have good control- they should be able to touch the ground with both feet while seated in the saddle. Brakes, lights, reflectors, bells and visibility devices (reflective tape or vests, flags etc) are critical to the safety of your child while riding a bike.

Skateboards and Roller-Blades

For the period 1999-2001, the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit reports that children 0-14 years of age accounted for 64% of all hospital admissions, and 54% of all hospital emergency department presentations. Again, injuries most commonly result from falls². Generally falls occur when a beginner trips or loses their balance, or an experienced skater is performing tricks. An outstretched arm is a natural reaction to falling, and the majority of injuries occur to the wrist or arm.

Scooters

Two out of three riders injured on scooters are under 14 years of age. Injuries are most commonly caused by falls, although collisions with pedestrians, vehicles and other stationary objects can also cause injury. The most common injuries are fractures of the arm and wrist, usually as the rider puts out a hand to break a fall.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

The correct use of well-fitted and appropriate safety gear can reduce the risk of injury to your child. When using any type of wheels, ensure your child uses the correct safety gear.

Helmet: This is the most important piece of safety equipment, as a helmet can protect a child from the most dangerous injury- to the head. The helmet should:

- Be a snug fit and securely fastened. If the helmet moves backwards or forwards, the risk of injury is increased.
- Be labelled with Australian Standard AS/NZS 2063.

¹ VISU 2007, 'Hazard Edn 65: Preventing unintentional injury in Victorian children aged 0-14 years: a call to action'

² VISU 2002, 'Hazard Edn 51: Preventing injury in sport and active recreation'

- Be in good repair. Never use a second hand helmet, or a helmet that has been involved in an accident. Damage sustained may be invisible to the eye, and this reduces the protection it can give.
- **Wrist guards:** These are designed to strengthen the wrist to reduce the risk of fractures and broken bones. Research has shown that wearing a wrist guard can prevent 90% of wrist injuries.
- **Knee/Elbow pads:** These are designed to protect vulnerable points that research has shown are common points of contact when children fall. They are particularly important for children when skateboarding, rollerblading and on scooters.
- **Visibility:** Items such as bright coloured helmets and clothing, reflective tape, reflectors, flashing lights and flags are all useful in increasing the visibility of a child on wheels.

PREVENTING INJURIES

- Always supervise your children on wheels.
- Always use correctly fitted and appropriate safety gear.
- It is important that children learn to use the product in a safe environment. Young children and beginners should never use wheeled devices in traffic or in poor light. Areas should be away from uneven ground, slopes and other users.
- Choose the right size and the right product. Select a product that is appropriate for the child's development and motor skills, and is not too big or small.
- Use the wheels in a safe way. Set some rules about where and how the product is to be used.
- Regularly check the product for wear and tear. Repair or replace items as needed.
- For more information on helmets, please refer to Kidsafe Victoria's "Choosing a Helmet" fact sheet.

DESIGN FEATURES ASSOCIATED WITH RISK OF INJURY:

- Small wheels and low clearance. These will make the rider more likely to lose control on an uneven surface. Products with larger wheels and pneumatic rubber tyres are more stable.
- Braking systems. This should work when a downward pressure applies friction to the back wheel. Often braking systems do not work, especially in cheaper models, and becomes less effective with age. Friction applied to a small wheel using a curved surface is unlikely to be efficient.
- Folding mechanisms and construction. Products that contain moving parts or fold up may crush or pinch fingers or limbs. Items may collapse while in use, if under pressure or after some wear. Some can only be tightened with fingers, and some have wheels that are poorly attached.
- Sharp objects in construction. Sharp edges or protruding points can pierce or bruise skin.

(Source: VISU "Hazard" issues 51 & 65)