



Call for quad bike education as injuries rise

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Researchers are calling for better education of quad bike riders after a recent study in the *ANZ Journal of Surgery* showed All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) injuries are rising at an alarming rate in New Zealand, with a 42 per cent increase in hospital admissions at Waikato between 2009 and 2010.

The introduction to the study paints an appalling picture. Over one-third of farm fatalities in New Zealand involve quad bikes, with quad bike accidents accounting for a further one-third of all workplace fatalities involving children. Over 50% of injuries and fatalities associated with quad bikes in New Zealand are sustained by farmers.

Recent Australian hospital data suggests the underlying instability of quad bikes is the main factor in accidents, leading to rollover of the vehicle in 39% of cases and serious head injuries in 24% of cases. Research suggests that children under the age of 16 are at a greater risk of injury or fatality than adults when operating a quad bike, due to their relative lack of physical size, strength or coordination. This is particularly evident when operating an adult quad bike, which can weigh more than 225 kilograms and achieve speeds in excess of 110kph.

The New Zealand study found a very low level of helmet compliance, with only 45 per cent of patients recording their use, and the head being the single most injured body region among patients (at 29%).

This is despite evidence linking helmets with fatality risk reduction and a reduced likelihood of head injuries.

The study from Waikato Hospital trauma centre examined quad bike admissions between February 2007 and March 2011 and analysed demographics, location, mechanism of accident, helmet use, length of stay, injury severity and type of injury.

The majority of quad bike injuries occurred within a rural setting, with 57 per cent occurring on farms. The age of patients ranged from four to 82 years of age.

Trauma surgeon and co-author of the study, Mr Grant Christey, says that enforcement of regulations, coupled with focussed delivery of safety education could possibly help reduce this shocking toll of death and injury, and help relieve an increasing burden on New Zealand's health services.

"We should be ensuring that strategies for engaging our rural communities in education programs and safety campaigns are effective in reducing the burden of injury from ATVs," Mr Christey said.

"ATVs are extremely useful in the rural sector. Highlighting the dangers of incorrect ATV use and making farmers more aware of their own safety could lead to people modifying their attitudes and behaviour."

The study results serve to reinforce the position of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Trauma Committee which has called for tighter regulation of quad bikes.

The College Trauma Committee have a position paper addressing the issue which can be found on the College website at : http://www.surgeons.org/media/348313/pos_2011-08-26_quad_bikes.pdf

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