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Safety Watch: Help farm kids play it safe

By Marizen Ramirez and Tammy Ellis

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This safe play area is within view of the garden and is fenced in with a tractor tire sand box.

Photo submitted

By Marizen Ramirez and Tammy Ellis

Farm families from the Midwest share many of the same concerns about safety of their kids on the family farm.

“My biggest worry . . . is knowing where they (the kids) are at when I am going out to feed the cattle or getting in any equipment,” said on farm mom.

Another farm mom said, “I am concerned about the machinery that sits in the driveway, the chemicals in the buildings and the highway. I worry a lot about the highway. It is very busy, especially at harvest time.”

Injuries can happen. A 2-year-old from Nebraska was severely hurt on the farm driveway.

His mother explained, “When our second son was two, my husband ran over him backing out of the driveway. It was a cold morning and I asked my husband to get the truck warmed up and bring it to the house. He went outside and didn’t know our son was following. . . . He was in a coma for seven days and had seizures at times.”

Nearly 1 million children live on farms in the United States, almost 259,000 are hired to work on farms, and many visit farms. Although the farm is a wonderful place for exploration, growth and development for children, sadly, each year, about 113 children are killed and 14,000 are injured on the farm.

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Children under age 10 are at highest risk. Most of these injuries are due to machinery, transportation incidents (involving tractors, ATVs and passenger vehicles) and drowning. Many of these injuries can be prevented.

The National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety recommends using a fence or barrier to keep children out of the farm worksite and to separate them from farm hazards.

It sounds simple, but it's not so easy.

Partners from the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health, the University of Iowa Injury Prevention Research Center, the National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, and the University of Nebraska Medical Center are working together to address this problem.

In a study involving 450 families from Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Missouri and Wisconsin, they distributed materials on "Creating Safe Play Areas on Farms" with instructions on fencing, supervision, play ideas and protective ground surface. The materials motivated families to create new safe play areas and make improvements to existing ones.

We can help our children enjoy the farm and be safe while doing so. As one parent in our study shared with us, "Make time for your kids. You have to do this or there is going to be an accident. 'Should'a - would'a' will cause regret. These are the important things."

For more information about the "Safe Play on Farms" program, visit www.marshfieldclinic.org/safeplay.

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