

Discuss ATV safety with kids early and often

By Mandy Archer, Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health

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Riders test an ATV with a rollover protection device during the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health annual tractor and equipment safety training courses.

Photo courtesy CS-CASH

It has been a little over two years since Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a new bill into law allowing off-road vehicles on certain public roads with restrictions in Iowa.

Directly following this law, ATV and UTV fatalities increased and are now in double digits with 19 fatalities so far this year. This September, to bring down deaths, Reynolds made Sept. 22-28 ATV and UTV Safety Week, with no change to the law that led to these fatalities.

She facilitated Safety Days at Martensdale-St. Marys, Winterset and Interstate 35 in partnership with Nationwide Insurance and the RideSafe Foundation.

School ATV and UTV Safety Days attempt to teach safe ATV handling, but most teenagers access ORVs before they reach high school and have already ingrained unsafe habits. More than 70% of young adults interviewed had driven ATVs before age 14, according to the Ag Health and Safety Alliance in an interview on the FarmSafe podcast.

Reynold's ATV law does not allow anyone under 18 to operate ATVs on public roads, but in reality, teens and young kids are on ATVs before they turn 18.

With the holiday season approaching, parents especially should take care in determining if an ATV is the right gift for their family. Start by considering your child's age. No children under six should be on an ATV. A parent or guardian must supervise if a rider is under 16.

The older someone is, the more likely they will be capable of controlling the ATV with their body weight.

Follow the chart at tinyurl.com/2d52ybkn to choose a suitable-sized ATV for a child. This step is beyond crucial to your child's health and safety. According to another FarmSafe episode with Dr. Charles Jennissen, 95% of all deaths of children occur on adult-sized ATVs.

Also, one in three ATV crashes involve those under 16.

Healthy habits start with the correct protective equipment. Helmets are one of the best protective measures and should always be on. The rider's helmet should fit snugly without moving around the head, and they should wear eye goggles if the helmet is without a face shield. The rider should wear gloves, long pants and sleeves to prevent further injury if thrown from the vehicle.

An ATV rider must never carry another person with them. ATVs are for one person alone, and a machine becomes off balance with another rider. This results in the inability to use active riding. Active riding requires the driver to shift their weight to make turns and handle the terrain without rolling.

If you add speeding or drug use to the equation, the risk of injury or fatality is even greater.

With the new law, ATVs are allowed both day and night, though driving during the day is recommended.

Although ATVs on public roadways are legally permitted, avoid driving on public roadways unless necessary. ATVs are a misnomer. They are better suited to off-roading due to their tire treads. Unlike car tires that grip paved surfaces and quickly release them, ATV tires grab hold of rough terrain.

These tips are in the Safety Tips for ATV Riders safety booklet at bit.ly/4fiA5gZ.

There are a few things to remember when using an ATV on the road. Anyone driving an ATV on public roadways must be 18 or older and carry a valid driver's license. The rider's registration and insurance must be with them, and they cannot exceed 35 mph. The ATV needs proper lighting and mirrors, and the most direct route must be used when driving on public roads.

The type of roads available vary, so check with your local legislature. These legal conditions pertain to ATVs and UTVs in Iowa.

Ultimately, know the risks of ATVs and make decisions on ATV use based on the research. Again, avoid driving on public roadways — 60% of ATV deaths have occurred on public roadways, and staying off the road could keep you out of danger.

Follow the laws and safety measures for the best possible outcome on your or your teenager's ATV.

Mandy Archer is the outreach specialist for the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health at the University of Iowa College of Public Health. To continue the conversation on ATVs, check out the FarmSafe podcast from the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health at bit.ly/GotoFarmSafe.

