

## Helmets for all seasons



By Corrine Langill, RN, BScN, Manager, Health Promotion and Injury Prevention at CHEO

With March break just around the corner, you may be heading out to the slopes for a little skiing, snowboarding or tobogganing... or you may be heading for warmer climates, and going on bike rides. One thing is for sure; to ensure everyone's safety, don't forget to pack your helmets.

Head injuries are serious. They can have life changing impacts on the lives of children, youth and their families. Wearing a helmet can prevent 70-90% of head injuries. Helmets should fit snugly. Follow the directions on the helmet package for the best fit.

### **Remember...**

- Children's head sizes change a lot as they grow, so helmets need to be adjusted or replaced as needed.
- Don't buy a large helmet for your kids to grow into. Helmets that are too big will not fit and will not protect your child.
- You can pass a helmet down to younger children in your family. Bike helmets can be passed down only if they have not been in a crash.
- Replace helmets after five years, or after a crash.
- When at the playground, have children remove helmets to play on equipment. The helmet or straps could get caught on a play structure and strangle your child.

### **Cycling**

In Ontario, children and youth under 18 must wear a helmet when cycling, it's the law. Bike helmets are 'crash' helmets; they are made to protect against one hard fall (single impact).

### **Always:**

- Replace bike helmets after a crash.
- Choose the correct size.
- Get a good fit. Use the foam pads that come with the helmet to make sure that the helmet does not move on your child's head. Some helmets have an inner 'basket' that can be tightened, making it easier to get a good fit.
- Use only a bike helmet for cycling, and make sure it's certified by CSA, CPSC, ASTM, or Snell.

### **Never:**

- Let your child wear a hat under the helmet. Wearing a hat makes it hard to get a good fit, so the helmet won't protect the head as well as it should.

### **A bike helmet fits correctly when:**

- It sits squarely on the head with the front of the helmet low on the brow (within two finger widths of the eyebrows – about two cm).
- The padding gives a firm, uniform pressure all around the head.
- The front and rear straps form a "Y" just below the ears.
- All straps are done up snugly...only one finger should fit between the chin strap and the chin.

### **All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs)**

Children under the age of 16 do not have the physical ability or judgement to operate ATVs, and they should not be allowed on them. For youth aged 16 or over, use a motorcycle/ATV helmet that is CSA, DOT, Snell or ANSI certified. These helmets can withstand impacts at high speed.

### **Alpine (downhill) skiing and snowboarding**

Use a ski helmet that has been certified by Snell or ASTM. Wearing a thin, fleece cap under a ski helmet is okay. Hockey helmets are designed for multiple impacts.

## **Hockey**

Canada requires that all minor hockey players wear a helmet with an attached visor or cage to protect the face. Look for the CSA label.

## **In-line skating**

Have your child wear a bike helmet or an in-line skating helmet (these are available, but not always easy to find), which protects the back of the head from backward falls. For in-line skating helmets, look for certification from CPSC, CSA, ASTM or Snell.

## **Scooters**

Bike helmets can be worn for scootering.

## **Skateboarding**

A skateboarding helmet will protect against many, less forceful impacts. They cover more of the back of the head, protecting skaters when they fall backwards. Don't use these for cycling – unless specified on the label. Skateboard helmets should have the ASTM F-1492 or Snell-94 approval.

## **Skating**

Hockey helmets will protect skaters from head injuries.

## **Snowmobiling**

As with ATVs, children and youth under the age of 16 should not drive snowmobiles. Motorcycle, ATV or snowmobile helmets will provide good protection. Make sure the helmet is certified by CSA, Snell, DOT or ANSI.

## **Tobogganing**

Ski or hockey helmets can be worn to prevent head injuries while tobogganing. There is no specific tobogganing helmet on the market.

### ***Product standards at a glance***

- *AS: Australian Standard*
- *ASTM: American Society for Testing and Materials*
- *BS: British Standard*
- *CPSC: Consumer Products Safety Commission (US)*
- *CSA: Canadian Standards Association*
- *DOT: Department of Transportation (US)*
- *Snell Memorial Foundation*

*So whatever your sport, make sure you stay safe with the right gear. To learn more about helmet safety and how to ensure your child's helmet is a good fit, please visit [www.cheo.on.ca](http://www.cheo.on.ca) – CHEO's new and improved website. Play safe and have fun!*

*This article originally appeared in the March 2010 issue of Capital Parent Newspaper.*