

## **Head injuries the most serious injury risk when kids are on wheels**

*Safe Kids Canada: Helmets can reduce the risk of head injuries by 85 per cent*

**Toronto, Ontario – May 31, 2010** – With spring in full swing and summer just around the corner, the number of kids enjoying wheeled activities like cycling, in-line skating, skateboarding and scootering is about to rise. But before hitting the streets this year, parents need to know one key thing: helmets save lives. Various injuries can occur from a fall, but the most serious are those to the *head*. Head injuries can often lead to death for kids on wheels – particularly in those children not wearing helmets. According to a Safe Kids Week research review, helmets can reduce the risk of head injury by 85 per cent.

The benefits of wearing a helmet during wheeled activities have long been touted by injury prevention experts. According to Transport Canada, in 2007 alone, over 1,000 children under the age of 15 were injured while riding their bikes. Other serious injuries include broken bones, facial injuries and serious skin abrasions that require grafts. Traumatic brain injuries account for eight per cent of emergency room visits by cyclists, four per cent of visits for both skateboarders and in-line skaters and six per cent of emergency room visits for injuries related to scooter riding in children under 19, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

“Serious head injuries are most often caused by falls; even seemingly minor incidents may cause short or long term brain damage,” says Pamela Fuselli, executive director of Safe Kids Canada, the national injury prevention program of The Hospital for Sick Children. “A child’s skull is only one centimeter thick and is easily fractured by a fall - even at slower speeds. When kids are on wheels, wearing a helmet can save their lives.”

Children riding bicycles are more likely to be admitted to hospital with an injury, but according to the Public Health Agency of Canada, traumatic brain injuries account for four per cent of emergency room visits for skateboarding and in-line skating related injuries, and six per cent of emergency room visits for scootering related injuries for children under 19.

According to a new Leger Marketing/Safe Kids Canada survey on helmet safety, more than a third of parents polled (35 per cent) say they are *not* concerned about their child having a cycling-related injury.

### **Cap off your wheeled activities with a helmet**

Children are most likely to get hurt when they are beginners and just learning how to ride; when they ride or skate near cars and traffic; when they do not use safety gear and when they go too fast or try stunts.

“It’s important to select a helmet which is approved for the activity you’re doing,” says Dr. Charles Tator, neurosurgeon and founder of ThinkFirst Canada, a national non-profit organization dedicated to the prevention of brain and spinal cord injuries. “Bicycle helmets are good for people on bicycles, scooters and in-line skates, but skateboarders need a different helmet that protects the back of the head.” A less obvious, but equally important, difference between bicycle and skateboard helmets is in the construction. “Bicycle helmets are intended to offer the best protection against a single, forceful crash, after which it must be replaced,” Dr. Tator explains, “but skateboard helmets don’t offer this kind of protection. They work best against multiple, less intense impacts most common in skateboarding. So wearing the right helmet for the right activity really can make a difference.”

### **Become a ‘Roll’ Model**

Most parents (73 per cent) say their child always wears a helmet when cycling. But when it comes to setting an example, both mom and dad could brush up on their helmet use. Overall, 31 per cent say they never wear a helmet when cycling.

“One of the best ways to get kids to wear their helmets when riding or gliding is by setting a good example,” reminds Fuselli. “Children who see their parents wearing helmets while cycling or gliding are more likely to wear their own helmets on a regular basis.”

### **Making headway with new laws**

Head injury rates among child and youth cyclists are approximately 25 per cent lower in provinces with helmet laws, compared to those without. Currently Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador and the Territories do not have mandatory bicycle helmet legislation for children under 18.

“We believe there should be a harmonized approach to helmet use for Canadian children,” adds Fuselli. “We’re advocating for helmet legislation for children in Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador and the Territories to ensure all Canadian children are protected equally.”

The majority of Canadians polled (90 per cent) support legislation that mandates bicycle helmet use by children riding on public roads, and 81 per cent support legislation that mandates bicycle helmet use by children **and adults**. Almost two thirds of Canadian parents (63 per cent) consider helmet legislation *as important* as seatbelt legislation.

### **Top five tips to protect your child’s head**

- Ensure your children wear a helmet every time they ride.
- Get the right kind of helmet. Choose a bicycle helmet for cycling, in-line skating and scootering. Skateboarders need a special skateboarding helmet that covers more of the back of their head.
- Ensure the helmet fits your child. The helmet should rest two finger widths above the eyebrow. The side and chin straps should be snug.
- People of all ages should wear a helmet when they ride. Remember: You are your child’s best role model.
- Children under 10 should not ride on the road. They do not have the physical and thinking skills to handle themselves safely in traffic. Children over 10 need to practice before they can ride on the road.

Today marks the start of the 2010 Safe Kids Week – *Got Wheels? Get a Helmet!* – which runs from May 31 – June 5, 2010 and is sponsored by Johnson & Johnson.

### **Spokespeople across Canada**

Safe Kids Canada has local expert spokespeople in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver who are available for interviews.

### **Got Wheels Get a Helmet Pamphlet**

Safe Kids Canada and Johnson & Johnson are offering a free educational pamphlet on helmet safety for parents and caregivers. Visit [www.safekidscanada.ca](http://www.safekidscanada.ca) to download your copy.

### **About Safe Kids Canada**

Safe Kids Canada’s mission is to lead and inspire a culture of safety across the country in order to reduce unintentional injuries, the leading cause of death among children and youth in Canada. As a national leader, Safe Kids Canada uses a collaborative and innovative approach to develop partnerships, conduct research, raise awareness and advocate in order to prevent serious injuries among children, youth and their families. Our vision is *Fewer Injuries. Healthier Children. A Safer Canada*. Safe Kids Canada is the national injury prevention program of The Hospital for Sick Children. Across Canada, Safe Kids Canada partners are conducting *Got Wheels? Get a Helmet!* events this week, educating families on helmet safety. To learn more about Safe Kids Canada and child safety, visit [www.safekidscanada.ca](http://www.safekidscanada.ca) or call 1-888-SAFE-TIP.

### **About Johnson & Johnson**

Johnson & Johnson is the founding sponsor of Safe Kids in North America (Canada, U.S., and Puerto Rico), and in 17 other countries around the world. The company also sponsors Safe Kids Week, Safe Kids Canada’s largest annual public awareness program designed to help reduce the frequency and severity of preventable childhood injuries, the leading cause of death and disability of Canadian children. Caring for the world, one person at a time inspires and unites the people of Johnson & Johnson. Johnson & Johnson embraces research and science - bringing innovative ideas, products and services to advance the health and well-being of people. Employees of the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies work with partners in health care to touch the lives of over a billion people every day, throughout the world. Johnson & Johnson has more than 250 operating companies in 57 countries around the world, employing 115,500 people and selling products in more than 175 countries. Johnson & Johnson worldwide headquarters is in New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA

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*Leger Marketing surveyed 1002 adult Canadians with children ages 18 and under about helmet safety. The national online survey was conducted February 1 – 5, 2010 with a confidence level of +/-3.1%, 19 times out of 20.*