

THINKFIRST CANADA'S SNOWMOBILING INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

Here are ThinkFirst Canada's top tips for reducing your risk of sustaining a catastrophic injury while snowmobiling. This information is taken from Chapter 16 "Snowmobiling" in the ThinkFirst book entitled *Catastrophic Injuries in Sports and Recreation: Causes and Prevention – A Canadian Study* edited by Charles H. Tator and published by the University of Toronto Press in 2008.

TOP TIPS:

- Snowmobilers should be older than 16 years of age in order to have the strength and stamina to operate a snowmobile safely.
- Graduated licensing should be introduced for snowmobilers.
- Wear a helmet that is up to the standard approved for motorcycles. Wear insulated and waterproof snowmobile suits, gloves, boots, and goggles.
- Avoid traveling alone and in unfamiliar settings.
- Carry no more than one passenger. The passenger should not be younger than 6 years of age (in order to have the strength and stamina to travel safely as a passenger).
- Do not tow any passengers on sleds, inner tubes, or other such devices.
- Avoid excessive speeds and avoid crossing ice surfaces. In the ThinkFirst-Tator study (2008) 26 snowmobile related deaths were due to drowning.
- Avoid riding after dark.
- Avoid riding on public roads and highways.

DID YOU KNOW?

- In Ontario, the overall injury rate for snowmobile riders is 3.17%.
- The ThinkFirst-Tator study found that in four separate years there were a total of 290 catastrophic injuries in Ontario, of those 120 resulted in fatality. The risk of catastrophic injury in snowmobiling is very high: 88 participants per 100 000 sustain a catastrophic injury annually.
- Between 2000 and 2001 snowmobiling injuries were the most common injuries in winter sports and recreation.
- During the ThinkFirst-Tator study, snowmobiling was the commonest cause of both fatal and non-fatal injuries in Ontario of any sport or recreational activity.
- According to the ThinkFirst-Tator study, the majority of injuries are sustained by males compared to females at a ratio of 6.25:1, despite a male to female participation rate of only 2:1
- The ThinkFirst-Tator study also found that the majority of injuries, 62.1%, occurred in riders younger than thirty.
- Of the 290 individuals with catastrophic injuries in the Tator study, 33.4% sustained head injuries, 30% sustained chest injuries and 25.5% sustained spine injury.
- Of the 120 fatalities in the Tator study, 79 (65.8%) were due to head injuries.

Risk Factors to Consider

Alcohol: during the Tator study, where information was available, alcohol consumption was involved in 57% of snowmobile injuries.

Speed: excessive speeds increase the chance of injury.

Trails: The Canada Council of Snowmobile Organizations indicates that around 80% of snowmobile related deaths occur off-trail, and less than 20% occur on properly maintained trails. Interestingly, around 80% of the total number of kilometers ridden each year occurs on maintained trails, while about 20% is ridden off-trail. This suggests that a high number of fatalities result from a small amount of off-trail riding.

Time of day: riding after dark will increase risk of injury.

Equipment: wearing a helmet will reduce the likelihood of injury.

Remember: thinkfirst.ca before you play!