

SAFETY BRIEF: ATV SAFETY

All-terrain vehicles, (ATVs) are enjoyed by many Alaskans for recreation, hunting, fishing, or day-to-day transportation. Many families across Alaska use ATVs regularly and many depend on them to get around their communities. However, the increase in ATV popularity has brought about a need for more information on safe riding practices to help prevent the rising number of injuries and deaths associated with ATV use in Alaska.

Did you know? Brain injury is a leading cause of death and disability in the U.S. At least 2.8 million Americans sustain a traumatic brain injury each year, according to the Brain Injury Association of America. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 26,700 children younger than 16 were seriously injured in 2015. That's an estimated 73 children experiencing an injury each day.

*In Alaska...*Alaska has one of the highest rates of people experiencing traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) in the nation. ATV and snowmachine crashes are among the leading causes of TBIs in Alaska, along with falls, other motor vehicle crashes, and assault. An analysis from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium recorded an approximate 1 out of every 5 reported injuries in Alaska included a brain injury between 2012 and 2016. In 2019, The Alaska Native Medical Center reported an increase in head injuries, many of whom were not wearing helmets on ATVs.

The Alaska Department of Public Safety recently identified 65 off-highway vehicle (OHVs) related deaths in Alaska from January 2013 through April 2021. OHVs include ATVs, dirt bikes, side-by-side vehicles, snowmobiles, and four-wheel-drive vehicles. Of these deaths, 43 (66%) occurred on-road, 17 (26%) occurred off-road, and 5 (8%) occurred in an unknown location. Additionally, 12 (18%) of the deaths were children age 16 or younger. Of all children in ATV accidents, 95% were riding adult-size vehicles. Children younger than 16 do not have the strength, size, motor skills, or coordination to operate larger vehicles. Most ATVs are not designed for dual riders. Riding double on a single-driver vehicle changes the balance and reduces driver control.

Gear Up!

A well-fitting helmet is the most important piece of protective gear for safe riding and defending your brain. Helmets should be snug and fasten securely, but still comfortable. Helmets that are too loose will not be able to protect your head properly. Like all equipment, helmets experience wear and tear over time and can get damaged after crashes, and should be replaced every five years or after one impact. Select a helmet that meets or exceeds the Department of Transportation (DOT) label to ensure helmet quality. If your helmet doesn't have a built-in face shield, you should add some goggles or a face mask to protect your eyes from debris, dust and rocks. You



should also wear long pants, long sleeved shirt or jacket, sturdy boots, and a pair of gloves. It's important to protect your head and your extremities from potential injuries and exposure to the weather.

Pre-Ride Inspection

It's important to perform periodic maintenance on your ATV to prevent vehicle breakdowns due to lack of proper care and maintenance. Inspecting the mechanical condition of your ATV before each ride minimizes the chance of being stranded or injured. Remember, you can ride farther in an hour than you can walk in a day. Some common ATV items to check include:

- Tire & Wheels
 - Air pressure, Condition, Wheels
- Controls
 - Throttle and other cables, Brakes, Footshifter
- Lights & Switches
 - Ignition switch (if equipped), Engine stop switch, Lights (if equipped)
- Oil & Fuel
 - Oil Level, Gasoline, Leaks
- Chain/Driveshaft Chassis
 - Chain, Driveshaft, Nuts & Bolts

Having a tool kit and emergency equipment helps in the event of an unexpected mechanical problem or emergency. Some items to consider storing on the ATV include spark plugs, headlight bulb, tow rope, bottle of water and snacks.

ATV Best Practices

A key factor in ATV safety is using common sense. When operating any piece of equipment, from powered hand tools to vehicles, you need to be focused on the task at hand to keep yourself and others around you safe. Never attempt to operate an ATV when you are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Use your best judgment. Listen to your body and be aware of your own limitations. Remember to take plenty of breaks and stay hydrated throughout the day. Don't attempt to pull off stunts you can't handle or venture into unfamiliar areas at high speeds.

Stick to riding during the daylight hours and when the weather is decent. Another critical element is understanding your ATV. Most vehicles are only equipped to handle the weight of a single rider. Don't overload your ATV with more cargo or passengers than it can safely manage. Be aware of your surroundings at all times, including changes in weather, roads and trails, other drivers and animals.



The acronym TRIPSS is a good way to reduce injuries while driving and operating your ATV:

T- Training; Take a free online ATV training course to learn additional safety tips at <https://atvsafety.org>

R. Ride Off-Road; When possible, ride on unpaved roads. The ATV tires are not made for paved or loose gravel roads.

I. Impairment; Never operate an ATV while impaired under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

P. Plan Ahead; Before riding, let others know where you are going and when you'll be back.

S. Single Rider; Many ATV's are made for one rider. When possible, drive without passengers.

S. Safety Equipment; Wear a helmet, boots, gloves, long pants and sleeves when driving your ATV.

Next month is National Brain Injury Awareness Month. Each March, the Brain Injury Association of America recognizes the 5.3 million adults and children in the U.S. living with some sort of permanent brain injury-related disability as a result of stroke, infectious disease, brain tumors, and TBI's. On a local level, the cities of Anchorage and Bethel have also declared the month of March as Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month. Last year (2022) Mayor Mark Springer of Bethel stated, "Out here in our region, we are sadly familiar with a variety of sorts of brain injuries that people suffer. . . Some they recover from, and some have lifelong impacts. You can get in an accident but if you're protecting your head, then the likelihood of getting a significant neurological injury is reduced."

Please refer to the included handout, "Tips & Practice Guide for the All-Terrain Vehicle Rider" from the ATV Safety Institute. Additional training on driver safety is available through the AMLJIA Online University at www.amljia.org. Log on to the Online University for courses related on this topic such as "Managing Speed," "Hazard Recognition," and "Driving with Distractions." For more information about the Online University, contact the AMLJIA at 800-337-3682.