

Injuries among Children under 15 in Eeyou Istchee

An overview of the death and hospitalization statistics, 1985-2007

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What type of injury is most likely to put a child in hospital? How many children die from injuries? A look at recent statistics tells us what kinds of injuries are striking children under 15 in Eeyou Istchee. This is a first step towards preventing some of those injuries.

How big is the problem?

Children under 15 are actually at less risk of serious injury than older groups. But this does not mean we should ignore injuries: it just means they are an even bigger issue in teenagers and younger adults. In fact, now that contagious diseases are uncommon and most children are fairly healthy, injuries are one of the biggest health concerns for children. In Eeyou Istchee, injuries kill at least one child every year, and put another 35 in hospital. And many of these injuries could be prevented.

What are these injuries?

Falls are the main injury that puts children in hospital, followed at some distance by motor vehicle crashes, accidental poisonings, and mishaps in which the child hits something while playing games or sports (Table 1).

Some other types of injuries are less common, but more serious. Over the past 22 years, the top injuries causing *death* in children have been motor vehicle crashes, drowning, and burns. (The number of deaths is very small, so cannot be shown for confidentiality reasons.)

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF CHILDREN HOSPITALIZED FOR VARIOUS TYPES OF INJURIES, 2001-2005

Type of injury	No. of children hospitalized
Falls	53
Motor vehicle crashes	27
Unintentional poisoning	17
Struck by/against something	16
Bicycles	8
Assault	7
Suicide attempt	5
All other types of injury	41
Total	174

FALLS

In recent years (2001-2005), a lot of the falls that have put children in hospital have involved broken bones. Most of these falls happened in the home, when the child fell from stairs, a chair, or a bed. Young children are more likely than adults to injure their heads when they fall, and this can be serious: seven falls in recent years caused skull fractures or other head injuries.

MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES

In Eeyou Istchee, the crashes that put children in hospital are about evenly divided between:

- ♦ Crashes that involve cars and trucks on the road system
- ♦ Crashes that happen off-road with snowmobiles or all-terrain vehicles (ATVs).

In most of the road crashes, the child was a passenger in a vehicle; but there were also several incidents in which a child on a bicycle or on foot was hit by a car. Some of these children died as a result.



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The snowmobile and ATV crashes were less likely to cause death, but still ended in hospitalization. Over the five years 2001-2005, six children had to be hospitalized as a result of snowmobile crashes, and seven as a result of ATV crashes. In some of these cases, the child was driving the vehicle. (The law changed in 2006, and it would now be illegal for a child to be the driver.)

ACCIDENTAL POISONING

Almost all of the children who ingested poisons were preschoolers age 1-4. None of these poisonings involved household products like cleaners, which suggests that parents in Eeyou Istchee are being careful about these. Instead, almost all the poisonings involved prescription drugs such as heart medicines or antidepressants. The hospital records do not tell us whether the children found these in the medicine cabinet or in some other place such as their mother's purse.

DROWNING

We know little about the circumstances of the child drownings, beyond the fact that most of the children involved were preschoolers (age 1-4).

Who is at risk?

Boys are at greater risk than girls for many of these injuries. The difference is especially large for falls.

How can these injuries be prevented?

PREVENTING FALLS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

To prevent falls, families can do things like...!

- ◆ Always watch babies when they are on beds, tables, or other furniture they could fall from.
- ◆ Use safety straps to restrain children in high chairs and strollers.
- ◆ Install safety gates so that toddlers cannot fall down the stairs.
- ◆ Route electric wires behind furniture, where it is harder to trip on them.

- ◆ Discourage children from active play on things they could fall from, such as balconies, high porches, roofs, trees, and tops of woodpiles.

PREVENTING MOTOR VEHICLE INJURIES

People and their families can...

- ◆ Reduce speed.
- ◆ Make sure they don't drink and drive.
- ◆ Use child car seats. These reduce deaths by at least 40%, and hospital admissions by 69%. They work by directing impact to the strongest parts of the child's body.³
- ◆ Make sure that older children wear their seatbelts. Seatbelts reduce the risk of death in a crash by 45-60%.² And they reduce the risk of serious injuries to the head, chest, and limbs by at least 50%.⁴
- ◆ Have children wear helmets when they ride on snowmobiles or ATVs. (This is now the law.)
- ◆ Obey the law that says no child under 16 should drive a snowmobile or ATV.



PREVENTING DROWNING

- ◆ Young children need to be watched whenever they are around water.
- ◆ Young children may need to wear lifejackets around deep water (e.g. docks).



PREVENTING ACCIDENTAL POISONINGS⁵

Families can...

- ◆ Install protective latches on cupboard doors.
- ◆ Use child-resistant containers for medicines (this is not foolproof, but it works some of the time).
- ◆ Keep medicines, alcohol, cosmetics, and household products out of children's reach.
- ◆ Keep purses and bags that contain medicines or cosmetics out of children's reach.
- ◆ Avoid telling children that medicines they must take are "candy" or "taste like candy."

References

1. Trueblood, Gordon (2002). Prevention of Falls and Fall-Related Injuries among First Nations and Inuit. Ottawa: Health Canada, unpublished.
2. Evans, L. (1986) cited in Auer, Anna (2002). *Preventing Motor Vehicle-Related Injuries: Taking a Look at What Works*. Health Canada, unpublished.

About these statistics

The statistics in this factsheet are drawn from a larger report called *Injuries in Eeyou Istchee: Analysis of Mortality and Hospitalization Statistics 1985-2007*. They are based on mortality records for the years 1985 to 2006, and hospitalization records for the fiscal years 1987-88 to 2007-08. The report was prepared for the Public Health Department of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay.

3. Beaulne, G. (1997) cited in Direction de la santé publique de Montréal-Centre (2001), *Prévenons les blessures chez nos enfants*. Montreal : Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre.
4. Sundstrom, I. (1994) cited in Auer [see reference 2 above].
5. Direction de la santé publique de Montréal-Centre (2001). *Prévenons les blessures chez nos enfants*. Montreal : Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-Centre.

Copies of this factsheet may be found at:
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