

Lawn mowers responsible for many injuries

Ann Arbor, MI - An estimated 30 children under the age of 12 will visit the University of Michigan Health System's emergency department this summer with a life-altering foot, hand, face or lower extremity injury or amputation caused by a lawn mower - wounds that are completely preventable with a little education and common sense.

In most cases, says Becky D'Agostino, a charge nurse in the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital recovery rooms, parents didn't realize that having a child sit on a riding mower with them or even having a child in the yard while they're cutting the lawn was dangerous. She and other UMHS nurses and pediatricians at Mott hope they can inform other parents of the dangers before more accidents occur.

"It's usually not until it's too late and their child is seriously

hurt that a parent says they'd wish they'd known about the dangers sooner," D'Agostino says. "Lawn mowers really have the potential to do great harm to the body, but so many people just don't understand that."

Each summer, U-M pediatricians and the U-M nursing staff at Mott see the devastating effects lawn mower injuries can have on children ages two to 12 and their parents - reconstructive surgery, long hospital stays, and permanent disfigurement and disability.

Safety tips

This year, the group is taking steps to help prevent some of the 2,300 lawn mower injuries that the American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons estimates children will sustain this summer as the result of lawn mower incidents, by providing parents with safety tips.

Tip 1: Keep the kids indoors while you mow. Several serious injuries can occur if children are in the yard while the mower is running. There's the risk that a parent might accidentally run over a child's hand or foot if he or she is playing too close to the mower, or if the lawn is wet and the child slips under the mower. Plus, there's always the chance that an object like a twig or a stone will fly out of the mower and strike the child.

"A child is just not safe in the yard when a mower is on," warns Dr. Frances Farley, assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at the U-M Medical School, who has operated on many children injured by lawn mowers. "When the mower's running, a parent can't hear the child and, in some cases with riding mowers, they can't see the child if the child is behind them."

More than half of all of the mower injuries that Farley cares for each summer involve a child who has been bucked over by a riding mower. In most riding mowers, the blade is still engaged in reverse, causing parents, relatives or neighbors to do serious harm to a unseen child standing or sitting behind the mower.

Tip 2: Riding mowers aren't built for two it may seem like fun for kids to co-pilot the riding mower with mom and dad, but in most cases, it's an accident waiting to happen.

"Riding mowers are not designed for two people," says Farley. "They're unstable, especially on inclines, and if a child's on it with an adult, there's always the risk for falling off and sliding under the mower. Parents always think their child is safe in their lap, but that's never the case."

And although most mowers

have a safety feature which shuts off the engine when the rider gets off or falls off, that same feature will not be activated if just the child falls off.

In any circumstance, regardless of age, no riders other than the operator should be on a riding mower. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics encourages parents not to allow children under the age of 16 to even operate riding mowers, and suggests that no child under the age of 12 use a push mower.

Tip 3: Adults operating lawn mowers are just as much at risk for injuries as their children. They should wear the proper hearing and eye protection, as well as sturdy shoes, not sandals or sneakers. In addition, they should go around the yard and pick up loose objects in the lawn to prevent objects from projecting out of the mower. Most importantly,

they should always turn the mower off before crossing over gravel paths or roads, to avoid flying stones.

With more than 22 percent of lawn mower injuries involving the hand, fingers or wrist, Farley says to always make sure the engine is off and the mower blade has completely stopped rotating before attempting to remove debris from the mower, or make adjustments to it.

Farley also encourages all adults to read their user's manual before operating the mower. Knowing how the machine operates will help avoid injury to both children and adults.

"The main thing to remember is all lawn mower injuries are completely preventable," she says. "These aren't just freak accidents. They're extremely serious and in most cases they change a child's or an adult's life forever."

Bad posture can be a real pain

Oh my aching back! Sound familiar? It could be that the way you are sitting or standing is ruining your posture. Many of us spend long hours sitting at computers, without taking a break to stretch or walk around, and this can sometimes lead to serious injuries. Roxanne Gill, manager of Lost Work Time for Oakwood Healthcare System's Abilities Management department, is in the business of decreasing work-related injuries.

"Poor posture can affect everything from low-back pain, to upper-shoulder and neck pain," said Gill. "When you are sitting with your legs crossed at your desk, you are stretching muscles which can trigger pain."

Whether you are at work or home, Gill, who is also an occupational therapist, warns people to be aware of their posture. Parents caring for their babies are especially susceptible to injuries.

"It's important to keep in mind that bending over a bassinet or a bathtub for long periods of time can create a lot of pull on the lower back muscles."

Gill also recommends taking time out to stretch during long car trips, flying and sitting in a movie theater.

"When people sit in the same position for hours, like at a movie, they

may be using poor posture, which affects their entire body. The muscles need oxygen to work and when that oxygen is cut off, injuries occur."

The Oakwood Occupational Therapy department recommends simple, no cost ways to avoid pain problems:

■ **Task rotation.** This involves switching from one activity to another every hour or two, preventing body parts from being exposed to the same posture. Task rotation also helps to lessen fatigue.

■ **Sit-stand option.** Constant sitting or standing is stressful to the lower back, neck and shoulders. Try to frequently switch between sitting and standing whenever possible. Remember to always use a good chair, and if you are on your feet, wear good shoes with anti-fatigue floor mats or insoles.

Oakwood Occupational Therapy recommends stretching the neck, wrist, elbow, leg and back muscles at least once every hour to keep blood supply flowing. Squats and deep breathing are also highly recommended.

More helpful tips to avoid injuries:

- With head in upright position, relax neck, shoulders and arms
- Position wrists straight, at or below elbow height
- Support back with appropriately



placed cushion

- Position knees at or below hip height

- Adjust the chair

- Rest feet flat on the floor or on a footrest

- Place the mouse next to the keyboard, at or below elbow height

- Position the monitor in front of you, at arms length away, with the top of the monitor near eye level

- Tilt the monitor or adjust lighting to avoid glare

- Stretch or walk at least once every hour

For more information on protecting your health and safety on the job, visit the Business & Industry section at www.Oakwood.org.

Here's the buzz on bee stings

There's a buzz in the air and it's not a friendly one. Now that summer is here, legions of stinging insects have begun their carnivorous assault on outdoor activities across America. These hostile marauders often leave in their wake widespread fear, painful stings and even death. If you find yourself under siege, resist the temptation to launch a counter strike. This type of retaliatory action is best left to the professionals.

According to the American College of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology, most insect stings result in a normal reaction. Symptoms include pain, swelling, itching and redness confined to the sting site. To treat a sting, gently disinfect the area using ice to reduce the swelling, and use topical steroid ointments or oral antihistamines to relieve the itching. Sometimes a normal reaction can be rather large, extending well beyond the sting site (a sting on the wrist may cause the entire arm to swell). If this situation persists for more than a day or two, a physician should be consulted.

More serious

For 1 to 2 percent of the population, an insect sting reaction will be allergic in nature. This type of reaction is characterized by hives, itching and swelling in areas other than the sting site, tightness in the chest and difficulty in

breathing, dizziness or a sharp drop in blood pressure, unconsciousness or cardiac arrest. An allergic reaction can occur in minutes after the sting and may be life-threatening. Immediate medical attention is required and may involve the administration of certain drugs and in some cases intravenous fluids, oxygen and other treatments.

Because there is a 60 percent likelihood of a recurrence upon re-stinging, allergic patients should seek follow-up care from an allergist. This specialist will evaluate a patient's allergic condition and may prescribe an insect sting kit for emergency treatment and/or immunotherapy, a highly effective vaccination program for life-long protection against allergic reactions.

A recent study published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* showed that most people allergic to insect stings who undergo a two-year vaccination program had a prolonged benefit and possibly will have a permanent loss of allergy. This is good news for the 2 million Americans who suffer from potentially life-threatening allergic reactions and the crippling fear associated with them.

To learn more about allergic reactions to insect stings, a free brochure written by the American College of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology is available by calling (800) 23 STING.

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