



## Ride Safely This Summer

As I travel the state of Nebraska to teach all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and utility task vehicle (UTV) safety, I am often met with the attitude that kids and adults believe themselves to be indestructible. When talking with those who have first-hand experience with an ATV or UTV accident, however, the attitude is much different.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, 650 people die every year on ATVs, and approximately 100,000 are injured. These statistics do not include the thousands of unreported injuries.

There are four points to consider before hopping on an ATV:

- An ATV is designed for one person. The center of gravity on an ATV is extremely high compared to other vehicles. With center of gravity at chest level, it does not take much to tip over – just a slight lean on a corner can overturn the vehicle. Adding a passenger or load moves the center of gravity higher and farther back. This creates extreme instability on slopes or turns. Putting a load on the front of the ATV to “even out” the weight does not fix the problem. It causes the center of gravity to go even higher.
- According to various sources, approximately 90-97% of ATV injuries to youth under age 16 happen when they are operating an adult-size ATV. Even when our children are physically able to operate an ATV, they are not equipped with the experience and maturity to handle such large machines. Even further, it is against the law in Nebraska (see Nebraska laws below). Smaller, less powerful ATVs are recommended for youth if they must ride.
- A common misconception is that riding ATVs on paved or gravel roads is safer than elsewhere, when in fact, half of all accidents happen because people are riding on roads. ATVs are not designed for roads. ATV tires are built with deep tread and more gripping area to grab whatever they come across. What is not seen in those tires is the difference in air pressure compared to street tires. ATV tires only have about 10 pounds per square inch, while street tires have around 33-45 psi. This makes ATV tires flatter to the surface and much more difficult to control on any kind of road or at high speeds.
- Lastly, helmets save lives. They are inconvenient, yes, but I ask: “Can you fix a broken arm?” Yes. “Can you fix a broken leg?” Yes. “Can you fix a broken brain?”... The most common injury is to the head, neck, and shoulder area.

One last recommendation has recently rocked my adult son’s world and he is lucky to be alive. Most farmers and ranchers do not consider wearing seatbelts when using UTVs (side-by-sides) on their property. Please wear seatbelts. More and more kids and adults are getting hurt or are dying because they aren’t wearing seatbelts. UTVs are even heavier than ATVs, and when they land on a person, the injuries tend to be more severe.

Finally, below are the requirements for use of an ATV or UTV in Nebraska:

- Must have a driver's license (for a full-size ATV or a UTV)
- Must use only between sunrise and sunset
- Must have liability insurance
- Must obey speed limit of 30 mph
- Must have headlights and taillights on at all times
- Must have an orange bicycle flag at least 5 feet above the ground
- Must never drive on any public highway, county road, or street, unless for an agricultural purpose (if your town allows ATVs or UTVs, follow town laws within city limits)

For more information or to schedule an **ATV Aware program** for youth or adults, contact **[susan.harris@unl.edu](mailto:susan.harris@unl.edu)**.