

# It's Snow Time!

Here's how kids can enjoy winter safely **DIANE PETERS**

**W**inter flies by when you spend time outdoors. But with the good times comes the risk of injury. Here are a few things to watch out for.

## FIGHTING JACK FROST

Exposed too long to the cold, ears, noses, cheeks, toes and fingers lose their ability to hold heat and can develop frostbite. Avoid this by dressing kids in light layers of clothing, covering their ears and having them wear boots big enough for extra socks and wiggle room for toes. Keep them indoors if the temperature drops below  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-13^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) or the wind chill factor sinks below  $-28^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-18^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). If skin has turned grey or white, warm it up gradually by covering it with the hands. Place a frost-bitten hand under the armpit. Don't rub the skin, massage it with snow or apply heat or hot water. "If skin is still discoloured after an hour, get to a doctor right away," says Dr. Louis Francescutti, an emergency-room physician at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton and a University of Alberta injury-prevention researcher.

## ON THE HILLS

Tobogganing can cause broken bones and head and spinal injuries — even death. "Parents should take the time to check out a hill before sending their kids



sledding," says Francescutti. Make sure that younger children tackle slopes of less than 30 degrees in steepness and that hills are free of bumps, ice, trees and rocks and do not bottom out near roads or bodies of water. Kids should wear a hockey or ski helmet with a thin hat underneath to keep the ears warm. The safest way to toboggan down a hill is kneeling — not head first (this risks head injuries) or on your back (back injuries). Do not use an inner tube or a plastic disc, as these cannot be controlled.

## ON THE ICE

Head injuries can occur during recreational ice skating, so children should always wear a Canadian Standards Association-approved hockey helmet for this activity. "Using helmets for recreation is recommended. It's good to get kids in the habit," says Shawna DiFilippo, program coordinator for Safe Kids Canada in Toronto. On frozen ponds or lakes, the ice must be at least 15 centimetres (six inches) thick for skating or walking and 20 centimetres (eight inches) for skating parties and games. Contact your local weather bureau to see if the ice in your area is safe. Avoid skating on ice formed on water with an underlying current, at the end of the winter or after a rapid thaw and refreeze. An adult should assess the condition of the ice surface and supervise children as they skate.

## IF YOUR FAMILY LOVES TO...

### Snowmobile

Children under age 16 should not operate snowmobiles, and kids under age six should not ride on them. Drivers should always wear goggles and helmets that meet the standards for use with motorized vehicles.

### Snowboard

Everyone should wear wrist guards, as wrist injuries (from using the hands to brace for a fall) are the most common ones in this sport. Studies have shown that these guards reduce the risk of fractures.

### Play far from civilization

Always bring snacks, water and a cellphone. Travel in groups of three or more, so that in case of an accident someone can go for help while another person stays with the injured party.

### Take winter drives

Car crashes occur more often in winter, so make sure everyone's buckled up and small kids have the right car or booster seat for their height and weight. Bring blankets, candles, water and snacks in case you get stranded. ❄️