

## Experts outline risks of 'action' sports

By **KATIE JORDAN**  
The Tattoo

Have you ever tried to do a cool new trick on your skateboard and ended up on the pavement with a broken arm?

You aren't the only one — lots of kids hurt themselves on their skateboards, Rollerblades or bikes each day.

According to the federal Consumer Products Safety Commission, about 36,000 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms after skateboard injuries in 1996. In that same year, nearly 103,000 people were treated for injuries resulting from in-line skating accidents.

With the X Trials coming up this month at Lake Compounce, kids are most likely going to be out copying their role models' risky moves — and taking tumbles in the process.

While most kids will suffer only bruises and broken bones, others could face something they'd never considered a possibility — brain surgery.

Dr. William Zempky, an emergency department physician at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center, said head injuries are the most serious risk.

If a young athlete hits his head, he may have bleeding inside the brain, called a hemorrhage, Zempky said.

Sometimes hemorrhages require brain surgery, Zempky said.

There is also the risk of a hematoma in the head, where blood collects between the skull and brain and puts pressure on the brain.

Zempky said another possibility is a concussion, which he described as when the brain is "sloshed around a bit" inside the skull.

Concussions, Zempky said, can cause amnesia.

To prevent these injuries, Zempky said, "we recommend kids always wear a helmet."

Bristol pediatrician Dr. Delbert Hodder said he often sees preventable injuries when

kids don't use safety equipment.

Most injuries he's seen are broken bones and bruises, Hodder said, but occasionally there are neurological injuries.

Because most kids who get hurt end up in the hospital emergency room, Hodder usual-

ly isn't the one to treat them.

Zempky is used to handling serious injuries when kids fall.

"We see kids doing crazy things on their bikes," Zempky said.

Broken arms are very common, said Zempky.

Wrist and forearm fractures can be prevented by wearing the proper safety equipment, Zempky said, but if they do occur, the patient usually has to wear a cast.

Kids bruise, cut or scrape themselves during falls — or get something Zempky called "road rash," where the friction of sliding along the road peels off layers of skin.

Kids can also injure their mouths during falls.

Dr. Joseph Cydelo, a Bristol dentist, said he has seen some injuries from biking and Rollerblading.

Kids may break their teeth or knock them out completely, Cydelo said.

If the tooth is broken off to the pulp — the bundle of nerves at the center of the tooth — it has to be removed in an operation called a root canal, he said.

To fix a broken tooth in an adult, Cydelo said he'd use cosmetic plastics or artificial teeth called caps. In children, he said, a white plastic filling material would be used to replace the tooth.

Another dentist, Dr. Bethany Brenner of Burlington, said she doesn't see a lot of injuries due to biking, Rollerblading, and skateboarding.

Kids who fall Rollerblading usually fall backwards, Brenner said, so they don't hit their faces often.

Bikers who have well-made bikes aren't likely to injure their mouths, either, she said. Good bikes have shock absorbers on the front, she said, which keeps

the rider from being knocked over the handlebars.

If you should happen to knock out your tooth completely, Brenner said you should wrap the tooth up or put it in water, and try to get to a dentist with-

sophomore, hasn't been quite so fortunate. Once when he was biking, he broke his right arm and spent two months in a cast, he said. Though he's also broken ankles and fingers and had concussions, he said he still bikes

**Kids who don't wear helmets can get a concussion, something emergency physician William Zempky described as when the brain is "sloshed around a bit" inside the skull.**



Jennifer Plonski / The Tattoo

Professional biker Matt Wilhelm, 22, recently gave a stunt demonstration at Lake Compounce without a helmet.

"I don't come off the ground and I don't ride the ramps," Wilhelm said. "It's important to know your limitations." Wilhelm said he gets hurt "quite a bit" but that injuries are mostly bruises.

"I've only broken two fingers," he said.

## ER doc's safety tips

William Zempky, an emergency physician at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford, offered these tips for skateboarders, bikers and inline skaters:

1. Always wear a helmet
2. Don't ride at night
3. Wear wrist guards and elbow and knee pads
4. Stay out of the street if you can
5. Have adult supervision

— Katie Jordan

## Quality gear can save your neck, shop owners say

By **KATIE JORDAN**  
The Tattoo

You wanna kick flip and ollie like the professional bikers and skaters at the X Trials? Maybe even take a crack at competing someday?

To make sure you don't break your neck doing it, you'll need some safety gear. Wondering where to get it and how to know what to buy?

Relax — there are plenty of bike shops in Connecticut that stock enough safety equipment to pad an army.

Biker's Edge in Bristol is a full service bicycle shop, said manager Ed Bogun. He said the shop carries anything bike-related, including extreme sports equipment.

"We don't recommend anybody to ride without a helmet," said Bogun. He said it is the store's top selling piece of safety gear.

Steve Cole, who owns Renaissance Cyclery in Plainville, stocks shin guards, gloves, elbow pads, and chest protectors.

Cole recommended that kids who want to someday compete in the X Trials wear all safety equipment and padding. But if you won't listen to him, he said, safety equipment is required for the X Trials anyway.

James Parrott owns CT Bike, another place in Bristol. Not only is it the oldest indoor skatepark, according to Parrott, it also carries a wide variety of equipment. Helmets, elbow guards, knee guards, wrist guards, ankle guards, and gloves are all available there, Parrott said.

David Hangen, manager of Southington Bicycle and Repair, said the shop just sells biking equipment. They carry helmets, shin guards, and gloves, but no elbow or kneepads.

Well, now you've seen what there is, what should you buy?

Most customers buy helmets with their bikes, Hangen said.

State law requires kids under 12 to wear helmets when they're biking, said Matt Macko, who also works at the Southington bike shop.

Helmets and other safety equipment are made of plastic, Styrofoam, and Velcro, Parrott said.

Cole said their safety equipment is made of a variety of cavelar — a type of plastic — leather, and heavy cloth.

So, you're convinced about the safety equipment. But wait, there's more.

Cole said that a proper bicycle is just as important as pads and other safety equipment. He said he's seen a lot of bikes that weren't properly assembled or were made of shoddy materials.

Bogun said, "I've seen bikes at discount stores I wouldn't let a dog ride."

Parrott said he's seen bikes with wobbly wheels, loose steering, and brakes that don't work.

"We don't have any cheap skates," Parrott said. He said his shop only sells aggressive skates, the kind that would be used in the X Trials.

All right, the quality of your bike is important, too. So, what is a really good quality bike?

Cole said good materials are key.

Bogun said they use high carbon steel, crom-moly, and titanium in their bikes, because the materials are both strong and lightweight. He also said their bikes have good grip tires to prevent skidding.

At CT Bike, bikes are made of crom-moly or aluminum, and the tires are rubber, Parrott said.

At the Southington shop, Macko said, they're made of crom-moly or aluminum as well. Not only are those materials light and strong, he said, they also are easy to shape.

Okay, now you've got good safety gear and a good bike. But don't think that's all there is to it.

No matter how much equipment you've got, Cole said, you still have to practice and be good to do well in the X Trials or anywhere else.

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT...

"Glory is temporary and pain is forever, so wear your pads," said pro blader Matt Lindenmuth.

"I'd rather have a helmet on my head and be called a dork than not to have a helmet on my head and be cool," said top ranking biker Jamie Bestwick. "I always wear one."

"I know many kids hate it," Lindenmuth said, "but just recently at Grand Prairie during practices, I hit my head super hard and without a helmet, I could've suffered some serious head injuries."

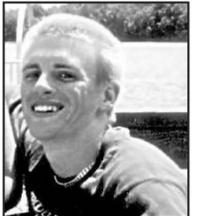
"I saw the chunk I took out of my helmet. I really did not want to see that in my skull," Lindenmuth added. Even so, Lindenmuth admits he hasn't always been that careful. "I went through my learning experiences. I wish more kids would wear them."

Pro biker Bruce Crisman said wearing a helmet is "definitely" the right thing to do. "You need it if you're doing extreme sports," he said. Wearing helmets, he said, "sets a good example for kids, too."

"Pads have saved me from a lot of unexpected things. Falls are unexpected. You never know what's going to happen," said Lindenmuth, who said he loves skating and wants to be able to do it the rest of his life.

"I care about my body," Lindenmuth said. "I'm not out there to ruin it."

— Mike Nguyen



Matt Lindenmuth



Katie Jordan

Katie Jordan / The Tattoo

## Watch for our Xtra!

Don't miss *The Tattoo's* first 'Xtra' on Thursday.

We'll have another full page devoted to delivering all the news about ESPN's X Trials, which will be held Friday through Sunday at Lake Compounce.

Thursday's page will bring the athletes to life, with features on some of the rising and established stars of extreme sports.

But that's not all.

*The Tattoo's* web site — [www.ReadTheTattoo.com](http://www.ReadTheTattoo.com) — will bring even more news of the X Trials by the best young journalists in the land.

It also contains the X Trials schedule and more information for those of you who want to see the action up close and personal.

Don't forget to surf the web our way to catch daily updates about the sports and festivities at Lake Compounce, as well as nightly recaps of who won and who lost.