

Utah Trauma Update: Serious Falls Among Children

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Utah Department of Health

Introduction

A fall is defined as a “move downward, typically rapidly and freely without control, from a higher level to a lower level.” From 2000 to 2012, 112,351 serious traumatic injuries were recorded in the Utah Trauma Registry. **Figure 1** shows 49% of all injuries are fall related. Typically when one thinks of fall-related injuries, the focus is on elderly falls or perhaps sport injury falls. *Surprisingly, 18% of serious fall injuries are suffered by children (age 0-18 years) as shown in Figure 2.*

How Do Kids Experience Falls?

Injuries resulting from falls among children occur in a variety of ways. Children may fall from a parent’s arms, be dropped by siblings, fall from a highchair, baby swing or other furniture, or even fall from a grocery cart or baby carrier in addition to simple trip and falls. Playground falls and falls from windows also account for a significant proportion of falls among children.

The CDC reports that falls are the leading cause of non-fatal injuries for all children. Every day, approximately 8,000 children are treated in U.S. emergency rooms for fall-related injuries. This results in almost 2.8 million injuries per year¹.

What Types of Injuries Occur?

According to safekids.org¹, unintentional falls are the number one cause of non-fatal injury for children. The majority of serious falls happen at home. **Figure 3** illustrates that among Utah kids, 51% of fall injuries occur at home, while 23.82% happen in a recreational setting. **Figure 4** shows that more than 1,300 serious injuries occur to children under the age of 1, as infants are more likely to fall from furniture, baby walkers and stairs. The graph shows a slight decrease in injuries to children age 8-12, while older children (13 through 18 years) fall more often during sport activities. Information contained in the Utah Trauma Registry suggests that from 2000-2012, 24 Children died as result of a traumatic fall during their hospital stay.

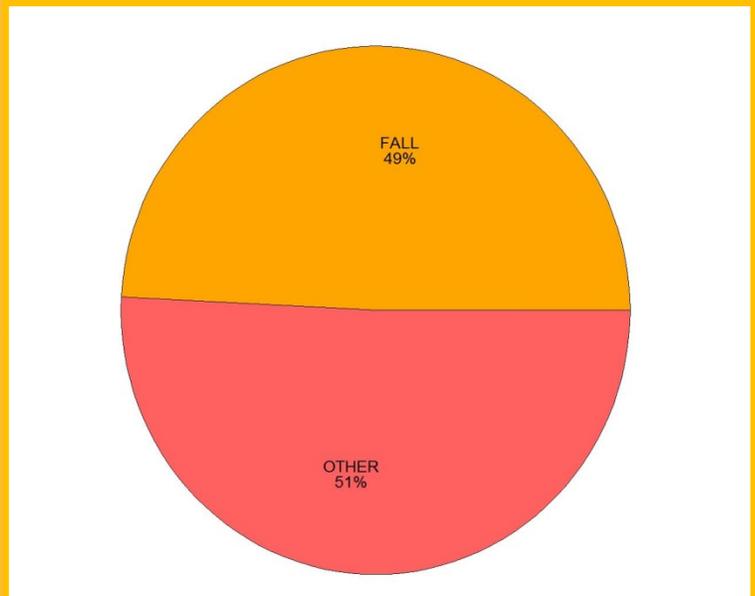


Figure 1. Falls account for nearly 50% of traumatic injuries.

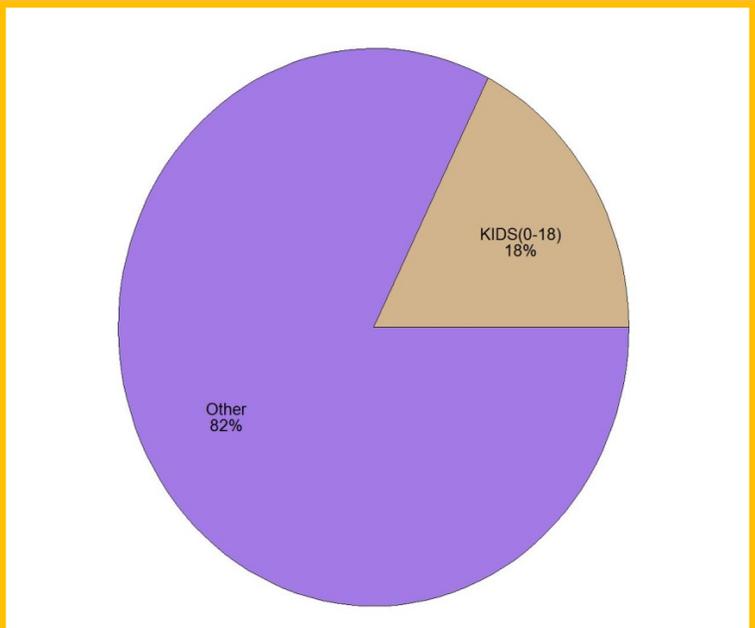


Figure 2. Proportion of falls by children 2000-2012.

Prevention Tips

Safe Play: Playground falls are one of the most common causes of injury. Keep an eye out for sharp items. Take your kids to playgrounds with shock-absorbing surfaces that are well maintained, and ensure children are dressed appropriately for the playground.

Make your home safer: Use home safety devices such as window guards, stair gates, and handrails. Keep windows closed and locked closed when they are not in use. Move furniture away from windows to help prevent window falls. Secure TV's and furniture to the wall using mounts, anchors or wall straps to prevent tip-overs.

Supervision: Supervising young children at all times is key. Stairs, playground equipment, and even grocery carts are fall hazards and can cause serious injuries. Make sure that safety equipment is functioning correctly. Keep babies and young children buckled in when using high chairs, infant carriers, swings and strollers. Never leave your child unattended when using a shopping cart, high chair, baby swing, etc.

Keep safe while playing sports: Make sure your child wears protective gear during recreation and sport activities. Helmets, knee pads, and wrists guards are all vital in keeping your young one safe while they are playing sports. Talk to your kids about appropriate play behaviors; some play can be physical, but teaching your child to know when and where it is appropriate is important.

Conclusion

In Utah, falls among infants and young children primarily occur in the home resulting in an average of 2 days in the hospital. Injuries among older children were more common in public spaces during informal recreation activities. To help eliminate fall injuries, make safe choices and remember safety equipment. Injuries to children can be prevented and together we can keep our children safe.

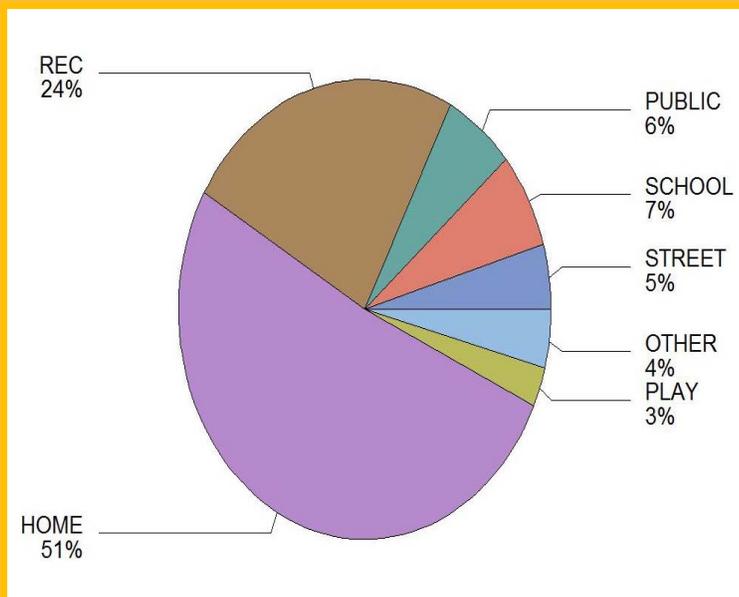


Figure 3. Location of Fall Injuries

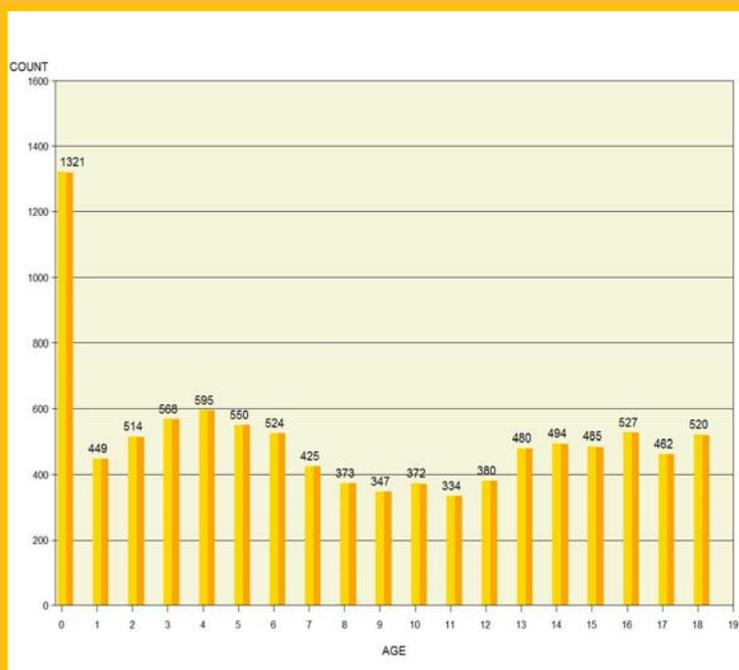


Figure 4. Falls by Age

References:

- ¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention.
- ² Home Safety Fact Sheet. (2014) Retrieved June 10, 2014, from <http://www.safekids.org/fact-sheet/home-safety-fact-sheet-pdf>