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Health Secretary Promotes Safety for ATV Riders After Sunday's Tragic Crash Teenager Died in ATV Accident Near Tijeras

(Santa Fe) – As weather warms and more people spend time outdoors, Health Secretary Dr. Alfredo Vigil encourages people to follow simple guidelines that can help keep them safe when they drive all-terrain vehicles and other open-air vehicles.

Riders can protect themselves by wearing helmets, eye protection and protective reflective clothing. New Mexico's laws require minors younger than 18 to wear helmets when riding all motorized and non-motorized vehicles, including ATVs, motorcycles, bicycles, scooters, skateboards, tricycles and skates.

"It is tragic to have the number of head injuries and deaths that occur every year in New Mexico that could have been prevented by simply wearing proper headgear," Dr. Vigil said.

The New Mexico Department of Health also recommends:

- Attend an ATV driver's safety course.
- Ride an age-appropriate ATV. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that no one younger than 16 ride a full-size ATV.
- Provide constant supervision when children are operating an ATV.
- Do not carry passengers. ATVs are designed for one person.
- Do not ride ATVs on the streets or at night.
- Never drink alcohol and drive.

A 2004 study by two University of New Mexico surgeons of patients admitted to UNM Hospital after ATV accidents shows ATV crashes result in serious injuries with people often requiring surgery and long hospital stays. The four-year chart review found that children are over represented in these types of accidents, and 40 percent of kids suffer some type of head injury.

"Many of the kids that I see from an ATV crash are injured because they were passengers on the ATV, were operating the ATV at too young an age or they weren't wearing a helmet," said Dr. Cameron Crandall, research director at UNM Department of Emergency Medicine. "It is very sad to tell a parent that their child has life-threatening and possibly permanent body or brain injuries after what was supposed to be a fun outing. Parents and kids can prevent these injuries and possible death by following the basic safety rules provided by the Department of Health."

In 2006, there were 555 reported ATV-related deaths across the country, according to U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. In New Mexico, 39 people died in ATV crashes and 175 people died in motorcycle crashes from 2002 to 2006.

To find an ATV safety course near you, visit Atvsafety.gov or call the ATV Safety Institute toll-free at (800) 887-2887.

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