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Sherry R. Lovan

Western Kentucky University, sherry.lovan@wku.edu

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Education is the Key to the Prevention of Lawnmower Accidents

Sherry R. Lovan RN, MSN
Assistant Professor
WKU School of Nursing

As spring approaches, we eagerly anticipate the earth coming alive with the rebirth of plants and trees. Neighborhoods will buzz with activity as people venture outdoors to begin caring for their landscaping and lawns. During the spring and summer, it is not uncommon to observe someone holding a child while operating a riding lawnmower. While most people do not think twice about mowing their lawn, nurses must consider the potential danger involved. Nurses have the unique opportunity to play a major part in the prevention of accidents through lawnmower safety education. Loder (2004) researched traumatic injuries in pediatric patients and found March and April as the ideal time for education for the prevention of lawnmower injuries.

In 2006, Lau, et al. reported 77,800 people were injured seriously enough by lawnmowers to require emergency room medical treatment. Of those injured, 9,300 involved children. Lawnmower injuries are one of the most frequent causes of mutilating injuries to children. Most injuries occur when a child comes in direct contact with a spinning lawnmower blade. The good news is that most lawnmower accidents are preventable if parents and guardians take precautions.

Shriners Hospitals offer care for children with traumatic amputations due to injuries involving lawnmowers. The hospital accepts any child for treatment regardless of ability to pay and furnishes children with prostheses until they are eighteen years of age. Some horrific incidents involving lawnmower accidents result in loss of fingers, toes, limbs, and even eyes. Children may also suffer permanent brain injury or death. The Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that most of the deaths to children occur when a child falls off the riding mower and is run over, or when a child is in a moving mower's path.

It is important for nurses to educate parents and children about lawnmower safety. There are numerous organizations which offer informative websites and free publications to the public

containing lawnmower safety tips. The Shriners website offers the safety tip to check the lawn for items such as sticks, rocks, toys, sports equipment, dog bones, wire, and equipment parts. These items could be thrown while mowing, possibly hitting the operator of the mower or people close by. An example of this type of injury occurred when a six year old child suffered a small puncture wound of the chest from a lawnmower-propelled projectile. This child presented the following day with complaints of fever and chest pain and ultimately diagnosed with a superior vena cava perforation (McKamie, et al., 2007).

Another lawnmower-safety tip from the Shriners website includes taking precautions when operating a power mower. Operators of the mower are advised to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts, close fitting clothes, eye protection, heavy gloves, and hearing protection. They should not wear jewelry which can get caught in moving parts. It is important to wear sturdy shoes with slip-resistant rubber soles and avoid open sandals or mowing while barefoot. Never reach underneath a mower while it is still operating—even if the blade is not spinning. Do not cut grass when it is wet because wet grass may cause the mower to slide because of the reduced traction.

Some lawnmowers are safer than others due to manufacturers installing safety features. Consider only purchasing or operating a mower with safety features and an automatic blade cut-off on the handle. In 2003, the Consumer Product Safety Commission announced a requirement for lawnmower manufacturers to install safety features that prevent a mower from backing up with powered blades. This important feature can reduce the severity of injuries that are caused when an operator backs into a child by stopping the rotating blades. It is important to note that lawnmowers manufactured prior to 2003 may not have this safety feature.

Most importantly, keep children and pets inside while mowing. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children not ride as passengers on lawnmowers and should not play on or around the mower. They recommend that children less than twelve years of age not operate a walk-behind power mower or hand mower. They further recommend

that children less than sixteen years of age not ride on a power mower. It is important to teach an inexperienced person how to use a lawn mower safely. Before an adolescent is allowed to mow the lawn alone, adequate time must be spent explaining the equipment and demonstrating how to do the job safely. The adolescent's work should be supervised until they demonstrate the ability to manage the task alone.

Pediatric lawnmower injuries are highly preventable as they most often occur due to human error rather than mechanical failure. Increased public safety awareness and further manufacturer safety modifications should be encouraged to limit this cause of pediatric trauma. Nurses can make a difference in preventing lawnmower injuries. Further information on how to mow your lawn safely can be found at the National Ag Safety Database website: <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000701-d000800/d000761/d000761.html>

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