

Snowmobile Safety

SAFETY TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Snowmobiling is a great family sport, bringing people outdoors to interact with nature and each other. It is an invigorating sport and is an activity that keeps parents and kids together. Like any sport, safe behaviour is a priority.

If your family owns or has access to a snowmobile, make sure you assess your children's abilities before allowing them to drive it. To safely drive a snowmobile a child needs to be strong, skilled and mature. By law, snowmobile drivers must be at least 14 years of age to operate a snowmobile independently. The size of the machine should match the driving capability of the child.

It also takes strength and stamina to be a passenger. You need to be able to hold on tight for a long period of time, often while the snowmobile goes over bumpy ground at a high speed. The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that children younger than six years old should never ride as passengers on a snowmobile.

Know before you go

- Keep your machine and trailer in good mechanical running order.
- Check the weather forecast before you venture out.
- Check the condition of the trails. In some areas you may need to assess whether there is danger of an avalanche.
- Avoid snowmobiling on ice if at all possible. If you must ride on ice, check for good thickness and condition to ensure safe crossing.
- Know the sign of hypothermia (occurs when body temperature drops to dangerously low levels) and what to do if it happens. Check regularly for frostbite.
- Always ride with a group.
- Plan your trip and always inform someone where you are going and when you plan to return.

Have the right equipment

- Wear well-insulated protective clothing including snowmobile approved or waterproof snowmobile suit, gloves and rubber bottomed boots.
- All drivers and passengers should wear helmets approved for snowmobiles along with either goggles or visor.
- Carry a first-aid kit, an emergency tool kit (with spark plugs, and extra belt), an extra key, food and a survival kit that includes flares. Carry a cell phone if you're in an area with service.

Drive safely

- Beginners should stick to familiar terrain and trails and drive only during the day.
- Travel at safe speeds, especially on unfamiliar or rugged terrain where you might run into hazards you can't see such as barbed wire.
- Keep the headlights and tail lights in good running condition to improve the visibility of your snowmobile to other vehicle operators.
- Don't pull people on saucers, tubes, tires, sleds or skis behind a snowmobile. If you must tow someone, the safest way is to use a sled or cutter attached to the snowmobile by a rigid bar connection. Travel at a slow speed over level terrain away from trees, rocks and other vehicles. A spotter should watch the individual being towed.
- Do not carry more than one passenger and do so only if the snowmobile is designed for a passenger.
- Never drink alcohol or take drugs before or while you're operating a snowmobile.

If you have any suggestions on traffic safety issues that are of interest to you and your community, or for more information, please contact:

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