

Whizzing speed, a hazard

# Skateboard injuries up

SAN ANTONIO — The human body was not constructed to endure high speed crashes which can and do happen when a person decides to whiz up to 60 miles an hour on a tiny skateboard, according to a local specialist in sports medicine.

The sport is enjoyed by those who like pavement whizzing by inches from their bones, and skateboarding generates a sensation of freedom and excitement. But an increasing number of cerebral concussions, fractures, soft tissue bruises and injuries to internal organs are being reported at hospital emergency rooms around the nation.

Dr. Kaye Wilkins, a clinical associate professor of orthopedics at the University of Texas Health Science Center, says the medical community is becoming more concerned about skateboarding as it becomes more popular with the younger set.

Wilkins and Dr. Mel Thornton compiled statistics on injuries suffered in unorganized sports for presentation recently to the American Academy of Pediatrics and is helping the Academy prepare a policy statement on skateboarding which would lay down some guidelines for the sport.

"We're trying to educate the public and the physicians," Wilkins said.

Types of orthopedic and neurological injuries that were seldom seen in emergency rooms in years past now are nearly everyday occurrences, he said. Since 1973, there have been more than 35,000 emergency cases resulting from skateboard accidents nationally, an increase of five- or six-fold over recent years.

A majority of the patients were between the ages of 11 and 20 with injuries involving the lower arm.

Wilkins said most of the injuries were not disabling, but many may lead to long term limitation in other sports activities as well as high medical expenses.

"If children are going to use skateboards, they must wear safety gear such as gloves, knee and elbow pads and lightweight helmets," Wilkins said. "Choosing a good quality skateboard and learning the hazards involved with the sport are important too."

"With children new exposure to this sport, wrist, knee, and arm injuries are happening more frequently."

New designs and modification of skateboards have increased their popularity, making them faster and more maneuverable with speeds up to 60 mph, he said.

But hard surfaces, lack of braking mechanisms, and the absence of

safety guards increase the severity of accidents.

Although it looks easy, Thornton said, youngsters often take unnecessary risks when performing stunts and adults may attempt to ride skateboards designed for small chil-

dren.

For that reason, sidewalk and random incline skateboarding are being replaced by large skateboard parks where riders with beginning, intermediate and advanced skills can ride with fewer safety hazards.

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