

Keep World Cup kickabouts away from the road

Local communities should find places away from roads for children to have kick-about during the World Cup, says the AA Motoring Trust. Germany 2006 coincides with the time of year when deaths and serious injuries among children rise by nearly 20 per cent.

In between matches, youngsters will be keen to rush out and emulate the skills and exploits of their soccer heroes, often in streets and places that put them in danger from passing cars and other traffic. Damage to vehicles may also cause confrontations with neighbours and other drivers.

The AA Trust urges parents and local communities to plan how to encourage children away from areas where they are at risk, to playing areas out of harms way with safe routes to them. Drivers also need to bear in mind that the chances of a ball rolling out in front of them, followed by a child, will be greater during the World Cup and take greater care while driving in residential areas.

AA Motoring Trust research¹ shows that a third of children injured on roads while walking or playing are alone at the time, and only 1 in 10 are with an adult. Boys have nearly twice as many accidents as girls when they are walking or playing near roads.

Emphasis on safe journeys to and from school, and dark winter evenings, tends to hide the fact that 80 per cent of child deaths and serious injuries happen outside the school day, mainly when the youngsters are playing, says Andrew Howard, the AA Trusts head of road safety.

The World Cup will fire the imagination of football-mad youngsters and local communities that resort solely to putting up no ball games notices are not addressing the real concern. Acceptable kick-about areas not only burn off childrens energy and let them act out their footballing fantasies but direct them to places where it is safe to do so.

NOTES TO EDITORS: ¹ Statistics quoted in the press release are taken from The AA Motoring Trust report "The Facts About Road Accidents and Children" (Feb 2003). The report studied children aged 15 years and under. The report is available online at: <http://www.aatrust.com/index.asp?pageid=70>.

May and June, when lighter evenings allow children to start staying out longer, are the months when the numbers of fatal and serious accidents involving children peak.

Killed/serious injury accident peaks were for:

2000: May 561
2001: May 554
2002: May 442
2003: June 400
2004: May 447

Killed and serious injury accidents by period of day:

Going to school (7am to 9am) girls = 155, boys = 215*

Daytime (9am to 3pm) girls = 342, boys = 750*

Going home (3pm to 5pm) girls = 452, boys = 845*

Evening playtime (until 9pm) girls = 586, boys = 1,216

*These include accidents that occur at weekends and in school holidays.

When child accidents happen (killed and serious injury accidents by hour of day and night) sourced from: Analysis by the Transport Research Laboratory of Road Accidents: Great Britain 2001)

Three golden rules for keeping children safe:

- 1) Set a good example and supervise them well;
- 2) Teach them and talk to them about roads and safety regularly not just once;
- 3) Know where your children are and when they are coming back.

The Think! Campaign advice leaflet on child safety is available at:

<http://www.thinkroadsafety.gov.uk/campaigns/hedgehogs/hedgehogs01.htm>.

