

Unsafe at any age: Lawn mowers injure hundreds of kids a every year



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By Mary Specht, USA TODAY

Lawn mowers hit or run over hundreds of children every year, and one of them was Mason Lindley. When his mother, Tracey, hit a bump as she backed up her riding mower, she was horrified to see 3-year-old Mason underneath the machine.

Her children "had been taught not to come around the mower," says Lindley of Burlington, N.C. "He must have had something really important to tell me."

But Mason didn't remember what it was when he woke up from surgery. He was missing his spleen, part of a lung, part of his pancreas and stomach, and all but 6 inches of his intestine.

Mason died last year of complications from minor surgery after surviving three years with his injuries.

Lawn mowers cause more than 74,000 injuries every year, according to a study released this month by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Rice University. More than 5,000 of those are to children.

Gretchen Dau, now 29, is missing a big toe on her right foot as a result of a mowing accident. When she was 11, the lawn mower she was driving in her yard tumbled down a hill, dragging her with it.

Now she explains lawn-mower safety to the fifth-graders she teaches at the Morse School in Cambridge, Mass. Mow hills vertically, not horizontally, she says; ask parents before using the mower; always wear closed-toed shoes.

A study by Randall Loder, chief of pediatric surgery at Indiana University School of Medicine, found that the cost of amputations because of childhood mower injuries was \$44 million to \$75 million. He estimates that more than 600 children every year suffer amputations because of lawn mowers. His advice: Keep children indoors under the care of an adult while another adult is mowing.

The potential to run over a child with a mower isn't the only danger, says Scott Levin, one of Mason's doctors at Duke University Medical Center and president of the American Society of Reconstructive Microsurgery. "If a stone or a stick gets thrown out of (the mower), it's like a bullet. Children have been blinded this way."

Contributing: Patrick Gavin



Tragic Case: Mason Lindley died in 2005 when he was 6. He was run over by a lawnmower at age 3. (Family photo 2004)

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