

Accidents to Children

WE are not taking accidents to children seriously enough. Children are the chief victims of motor-vehicle accidents. It is as pedestrians they get hurt mostly. In some countries more children under five years are killed by motor-cars than by measles, meningitis, diphtheria and whooping cough. It is as cyclists that children suffer next. Apart from children hurt inside motor-cars, we have those knocked over on the roads or off bicycles. As a result you, as a taxpayer, are defraying the cost of a lot of beds unnecessarily tied down to treating accidents.

Take children aged 0-7 years! About one eighth of the total bed space occupied by children in our hospitals is taken up by accidents and poisonings. Nearly thirteen per cent of the total time spent in hospital by children of this age group is for patching up preventable accidents and poisonings. When we take the next age group 8-14 years, the position is even worse. Of the total time spent by this age group in hospital, twenty per cent in boys and ten per cent in girls, is for accidents and poisonings. The next nearest occupier of beds is rheumatic fever—but that's only five per cent of the total time. Respiratory troubles and other things

This is the text of a talk on health broadcast recently from ZB, YA and YZ stations of the NZBS by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Deputy-Director-General of Health

are lower still. So you see, New Zealand is as bad as other countries in letting its children be damaged, and it doesn't really say much for our sense as taxpayers. We wouldn't have to build so many hospital beds if all families taught their children road sense and looked after their household poisons better.

This matter of road sense! First, for the walking child. Do you leave it all to the school or kindergarten, or do you set out from toddling stage, to get road sense into the pre-school child's head? If you make a game of it, stopping at the kerb, looking up the street, looking down, stepping out briskly when clear, and if the patience is there to continue until the lesson is learnt, there'll be pedestrian road sense before school-days.

Now we come to wheels that every child wants in some form or other—scooter, pedal-car or tricycle. Please keep those toddler and pre-school wheels inside your gates, or if outside be allowed, only and always on footpaths.

Sooner or later you'll be asked for a bicycle. The request will start long before you think the child is old enough to handle one. What are you to do, knowing full well that giving in may be a hostage to fortune, and that with bicycles accidents may be just around the corner? It's very hard to hold out when a sizeable proportion of primary school children go to school per bike. I think parents should delay as long as possible, but I'm afraid with the modern child, if you survive the seventh or eighth year without a bicycle, you are doing famously. Most parents capitulate before the eighth year, so obviously old heads have to be put on young shoulders, and you, the parent, must see that bicycle road sense is developed as soon as possible—the proper road signs, the rules about turning with approaching traffic! The bicycle shouldn't be used on roads until the child understands these things.

There are some things you can do to see that cycling is safer. Make your child care for his bike, clean it and oil it regularly. Keeping his cycle efficient peps up pride in being a good rider and a safe cyclist. See that the size is appropriate to the child,

for whatever you buy, a child's growth will outmode it in about four years. The best test for size, also for safety, is that the child is able to touch the ground with one foot. The use of wooden blocks on pedals is unsafe. The body weight, if over the rear wheel only, makes for wobbles, swerves and instability, so it should be carried slightly forward of that wheel. The hand grips are best for safety when at right angles to the arms. There shouldn't be crouching as on a racing bike, or stretching out—those attitudes are for racing, not safety, on the roads. The arms should be straight for quick control. Lastly, teach your cyclist child to test the brakes as he goes down the path before entering the road.



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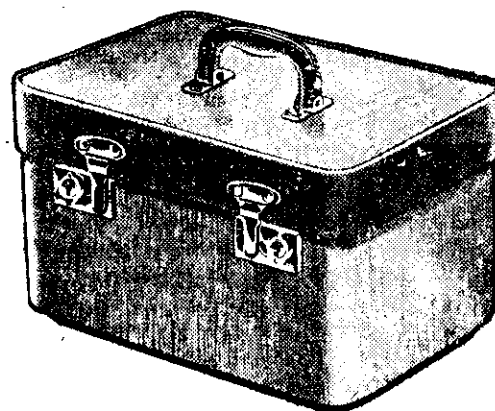
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