

Ice Skating Safety Tips

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An indoor ice rink is the safest place to skate, but some children make use of a pond or lake. The greatest danger in this, of course, is thin ice. Always be sure to contact your local police or park and recreation department to find out which bodies of water are safe for skating. Ice activities might be considered safe when the ice has been inspected and is at least 4-inches thick. However, please be aware that conditions may change and an adult should always supervise children and teens. Ice can be very dangerous, and people can be injured or killed when ice is not respected. When it comes to ice skating, please remember one rule.... **THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SAFE ICE!**

Ice on ponds, lakes, and rivers can be affected by many variables. The strength and thickness of the ice should be known before any activities take place on it. Many factors affect ice quality. Ice is subject to variable freezing temperatures from above and yet constantly thawing temperatures below due to water temperatures in the 40-degree Fahrenheit range. Wind whipped water, areas where there is any water movement due to either overland runoff or underground springs, and shaded or sunny areas, all lead to freezing and thawing conditions. Snow is another problem as snow cover acts as an insulator and ice may actually begin to melt despite freezing temperatures. **WORD OF CAUTION:** river ice is usually 15 percent weaker than pond or lake ice.

ICE SAFETY TIPS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- New ice is usually stronger than old ice. As ice ages, the bond between the crystals decay making it more dangerous and weaker, even if melting has not occurred.
- Wind speeds influence ice formation. Light winds speed up the formation. Strong winds force water from beneath the ice and can decay the edges of the ice.
- Snow can insulate ice and keep it strong. It can also insulate it to keep it from freezing. When ice is covered by snow, great precautions need to be taken to determine ice thickness before starting any activity. Snow can also hide cracked, weakened, and open water areas.

- Slush is a danger sign. It indicates that ice is no longer freezing from the bottom and indicates weak or deteriorated ice.
- Ice can change with the surrounding climate conditions. Temperature, precipitation (such as snow, sleet, or rain) wind speed, ice age, water depth, and water quality are all factors that affect ice strength and thickness.
- Never check the ice or rescue a person who has fallen through alone, because you could go from rescuer to victim very quickly.
- Skate at your own risk.
- Ice thickness is not consistent. Water currents, particularly around narrow spots, bridges, inlets and outlets, are always suspect for thin ice.

The most common injuries among ice skaters involve the lower extremities, and about 20% of the injuries occur in the ankle. To minimize these injuries, select skates that fit your child well, not ones that he or she can 'grow into.' Oversized skates are wobbly and more likely to cause a fall or ankle sprain.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS need to be taken to assure the ice is safe for your winter recreational activities. Always check the ice before going out on it. Be aware that ice thickness and strength can vary from location to location. Remember that even when the pond or lake is determined safe for skating, never skate alone and do not gather in large groups on one spot. Do not skate after dark and please warn other skaters of dangerous conditions. It is a good idea to have a rope, ladder, or pole available that could be extended to a victim in an emergency, and be knowledgeable that hypothermia, the rapid cooling of a person's body, can result in death. By following smart safety procedures you can bundle up, be safe and enjoy the many winter activities in our great outdoors.

For additional information, contact your local Outreach and Extension Center or the MU Extension Rural Safety and Health Program, 1.800.995.8503.

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