

Wheeled Shoes Pose Risk of Injury

Doctors blame a new type of shoe for a growing number of injuries among children.

The culprit: a fad called heeling that uses sneakers with a wheel on the heel. Known as heeleys, roller shoes, or street gliders, the shoes carry safety risks similar to those for inline skates, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS).

Kids in roller shoes merely shift their body weight backward over the heels so the wheels engage. Suddenly they're rolling, not walking.

Broken bones

"Orthopedic surgeons are, in fact, seeing children come into their practices with injuries due to heeleys," says AAOS President James H. Beaty, M.D., a Memphis pediatric orthopedic surgeon. Most have broken bones in the hand, wrist, or elbow. "As these shoes are sold in department stores, parents buying them may develop a false sense of security—that they are like any other shoe."

How common are injuries? Statistics are few, but in an Irish study, a single Dublin site, Temple Street Children's University Hospital, saw about seven heeley injuries a week in summer 2006. Four out of five injuries involved girls, many of them hurt the first time they used the shoes or while learning to use them. That led the study's authors to urge close supervision during the learning curve, according to the journal *Pediatrics*.

The AAOS and the Dublin researchers say children using roller shoes should wear protective gear at all times. "If children are to 'heel,' it should not be done while going down a hill, over a curb, or over rocky areas," Dr. Beaty adds.

Safety tips

To avoid injuries, heed this advice:

- Learn the basic skills before venturing out. It's vital to know how to stop properly.
- Wear a helmet, wrist protectors, and knee and elbow pads.
- Avoid rolling on crowded walkways or in traffic.
- At a crosswalk, obey traffic signals.
- Stay to the right side of the sidewalk.
- Don't weave in and out of crowds.
- Heel on smooth surfaces, away from traffic.
- Always supervise a young child on heeleys.