



## **Children at Risk on Farms.**

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The summer months provide a welcome opportunity for children everywhere to spend more time outside, and that includes time spent on farms.

play safe,  
stay safe

Ever present dangers arise from everyday items, such as slurry, tractors and machinery, vehicles in the farm yard and heavy unstable objects. Children do not have the same understanding of the dangers and have to rely on precautions put in place by adults to keep them safe.

On most farms the family home is relatively close to the activities in the main farmyard. Sadly there have been 11 deaths of children on Northern Ireland farms as the result of farm accidents during the last 5 years. The average age was just 5 over a range of 2 to 12 years.

The causes were not new and tend to be repeated in the following categories: -

### ***Passengers on tractors***

During the period two victims fell from and were run over by tractors on which they had been passengers and a third fell from a handler. There is no justification for the practice of carrying children on tractors or machines. Few escape such a fall because the driver can never react fast enough to stop in time. It is illegal for anyone to carry a passenger of less than 13 years old on a tractor or allow them to drive. Tractor cabs are not designed to carry children as passengers as the risks of falling out are much greater than for other vehicles. The same applies to handlers, which are also widely used for farm work. Taking children to work sites in this way has led to tragedy.

### ***Drowning risk***

Four children also drowned in slurry storage areas. These must be fenced to a high standard so than children cannot gain entry. Gates and any other access points for the tanker hose or pump must be protected to the same standard. Temporary openings are lethal because, although it is intended to close them up, time goes on and it is often too late to prevent an accident. Care must be taken to avoid providing a climbing frame by storing old gates, pallets or other items against the fence or walls. Farmers have been known to express the view that "children never would go there" when discussing a remote corner. Sadly accident investigations regularly prove that they do seek out seemingly unattractive places with tragic consequences. Surface crusts can appear, in the eyes of a child, safe to walk on but they have little understanding of these dangers and depend on adults to keep them safe by providing adequate fencing.

### ***Heavy objects***

Implements or heavy objects are often left off in "handy" places but unless they are well secured an unwary child can dislodge them. The main offenders are detached heavy gates, spare tractor wheels, unused silage barrier sections and the like. Stacked fertiliser bags round bales and building materials also pose a risk. Part constructed walls or those, which have been damaged, may also be unstable. Hazards can also develop. For example a cement mixer parked at a pile of sand may appear stable until children play around it and dig close to one of the wheels. One day the heavy mixer keels over when children are present.

Tractors need to be parked securely with the implements lowered to the ground. Take out the key and lock the cab to prevent the possibility of the controls being disturbed.

### ***Farmyard traffic and moving machinery***

Visiting delivery or collection vehicle drivers need to be made aware if children may be about. Routes should be arranged to avoid the need for reverse turning manoeuvres near to the farm dwelling or play

area. **A fenced safe play area is essential for the supervision and protection of young children away from the yard traffic route.** Extra care must also be taken if a contractor parks equipment where children can get to it and they may be hidden when the driver returns to move it. Silo ramps are particularly dangerous places when filling work is in progress.

Children must also be kept away from fields or sites where machinery is working.

### ***Inflammable materials***

Hay or straw is easily ignited and fire can kill. Children should not be allowed to play around stacks or have access to matches.

### ***Other areas of concern***

#### ***Quads***

The growing popularity of the ATV or Quad has brought new dangers. Those purchased for farm work are powerful machines, designed for adult use, requiring special training to master the required riding skills. Manufactures also rightly specify that riders must be at least 16 and wear a helmet. The key should be removed from the Quad when it is left unattended.

#### ***Poisonous or harmful substances***

These include pesticides, dairy cleaning agents, medicines and even some household cleaning agents. They must be kept secure with the containers returned to store or disposed of safely after use.

#### ***Contact with farm animals***

Just getting in the way of large animals on the move can injure children. At times, animals can also react violently when scared or protecting their young.

Animals also carry disease and children are vulnerable to illness such as that caused by contact with E.Coli or Cryptosporidiois. Children need to be supervised to avoid direct handling of the animals, their feed or surroundings. It is essential to wash their hands thoroughly before meals to reduce the risk of problems.



Information on farm safety is available in a wide range of formats from HSENI, including leaflets, videos and interactive web-games. Inspectors are available to give talks to schools and information events. Contact HSENI's Information and Advice Helpline on 0800 0320121, call into the Information and Advice Centre at 83, Ladas Drive, Belfast or visit our website ( [www.hсени.gov.uk](http://www.hсени.gov.uk) ) which has a special section for children.