



Review Family Farm Safety Rules¹

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Agriculture is a unique industry because children can be exposed to potentially dangerous situations 24 hours a day. The farm is both a work and a home environment for many families. Without a separation between these two environments, children can be exposed to tremendous risks. However, care and guidance from adults can reduce the risks for children living on Iowa farms.

In the United States last year, more than 300 children died in agriculture-related accidents. No other industry includes children in its injury and death rates.

During 1991, the Iowa Department of Public Health recorded 559 farm-related injuries and 10 fatalities to Iowans under the age of 19 years. Many injuries to children are not directly related to their work or chores, and could have been prevented by planning and an active commitment to safety by adults.

THE FARM ENVIRONMENT

The Norman Rockwell image of a wholesome, safe atmosphere that surrounds agricultural production is far from reality. The hazards are diverse and relate directly to the operation.

Potential hazards are associated with equipment, structures, and livestock. For example, grain often is unloaded by augers driven by tractor power take-off units

in a work area near the farm living and playing area. Young children also may interact with livestock, which are unpredictable and can crush children.

This publication deals with family safety rules. A carefully considered set of family farm rules are a necessity for young children and visitors to the farm; they also can be helpful for older children who have responsibilities on the farm. Tailor farm safety rules to your operation and family.

One way to keep children safe on the farm is to create a safe environment for them. Although safety is a daily process, one way to strengthen your family's safety rules is to 1) designate safe play areas; 2) determine other areas that might attract children; 3) identify dangers with children; and 4) model safe practices for children.

DESIGNATE PLAY AREAS

Identify locations where children can play without adult supervision. Designated play areas protect children by isolating them from the farm work environment. One play area might be the porch of the farm house and the surrounding yard. A fence will reinforce the division between the work and play environment.

Try to provide appropriate play items, such as swings, a sand box, or playhouse, which make the play area appealing to children. If the farmstead is more enticing than the designated play area, your efforts may not be effective.

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DETERMINE OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Discuss with children where they like to play on the farm, and why they like to play there. This might help identify potential problems, and it will give you the opportunity to explain why off-limit areas are dangerous. An explanation is more effective than a "Don't play here" rule. Use examples of what can happen in those areas, or relate true stories about other children who have been injured.

IDENTIFY HAZARDS AROUND THE FARM

Once you've created a safe play area, provide children with reasons to stay there. Walk with children through different areas of the farming operation and point out potential hazards. Explain what makes these areas dangerous. Show older children newspaper accounts of accidents to show that hazards are real.

Include all aspects of your farming operation. A walking tour should include agricultural machinery and equipment, livestock pens and fields, farm buildings such as grain storage structures, and the farm workshop. Reinforce the following points about each area:

Machinery and equipment: This area is most dangerous when tractors and other machines are in operation. Adults may not be able to hear or see others in the area, or they may be distracted by children's play. Children should **never** enter areas where machines are in operation unless supervised, or until the operator has turned off equipment.

Livestock: Children may be fascinated by livestock and perceive them to be similar to the stuffed animals they play with. However, farm animals can harm people out of territorial protection, maternal instincts, social relationships, or interruption of their habits. Children might not understand or perceive subtle signs an animal will exhibit just before attacking. The difference in body weight between a child and an average farm animal makes crushing injuries common.

Farm buildings: Confined spaces such as silage storage structures can hold a build-up of lethal gases. As with other hazards, it requires a smaller amount of dangerous gas or agricultural chemicals to cause serious injury in a child than an adult.

Farm workshop: These areas contain hand tools, chemicals such as oils and cutting fluids, electrical outlets, and sharp or hot items, such as welded metal. A child can be exposed to many injury-causing items in this environment.

BE A MODEL FOR SAFETY

Adults set an important example by safety-conscious actions and attitudes. Children will respond to your concerns about safety if they see adults practicing safety rules in daily life.

Here are a few excellent safety practices that adults can pass on to children, practices that could save lives.

- Follow the "one seat-one rider" rule. Do not allow extra riders on tractors, or passengers on grain wagons and other mobile equipment.
- Read and follow safety instructions in the operator's manual for all equipment.
- Always stop equipment operation when a non-working person enters the area.

Designated play areas and safety rules around the farm will not be effective if they are not enforced or become part of daily life. Keep in mind that children need to be reminded of the rules frequently. They need to hear rules on a regular basis and be taught a few rules at a time. Thoughtful consideration of family rules can make the farm a safer place for children.

FARM YOUTH SAFETY

How Much Do You Know?

The high number of farm-related injuries to children shows a need for safety. Test your safety knowledge with this quick quiz.

1. How many Iowans under the age of 19 years were injured or killed in farm accidents in 1991?
 - a. between 500 and 600 Iowa youths
 - b. between 100 and 150 Iowa youths
 - c. less than 50 Iowa youths
 - d. none of the above
2. Usually children are injured on the farm when they are involved in chores or are working. True or false?
3. Designated play areas can be relatively safe for unsupervised play by young children on the farm. True or false?
4. Identify the four major hazard areas on the farm that pose dangers for children.
5. Children identify with safety habits followed by adults in their daily routines. True or false?

See answers at the end of "What Can You Do?".

What Can You Do?

Safety is critically important for children who live on the farm. Here are a few ways to make the farm a safe place for children.

- Apply brightly colored hazard decals to all areas that should be off-limits for children. Tell children what the decals mean.

- Discuss with children some of the dangers associated with living and working on a farm.
- Designate a play area for children on the farmstead. If possible, fence the area.
- Set a good example for children by following safe practices in your operation.

Answers to quiz:

1-a; 2-False; 3-True; 4-machinery and equipment, livestock areas, farm buildings, and the farm workshop; 5-True.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This publication covers only some aspects of farm safety for children. Try the following sources for more information:

- *Safety Project Guide*, 4H-692-MP, available at your local Extension office. Fee for publication.
- *Farm Safety Walkabout Handbook*, available from the Iowa Department of Public Health, Lucas State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Fee for publication.
- The Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, a national organization that promotes safety, also may have helpful programs or resources. Contact the group at 130 East First Street, Earlham, Iowa 50072. Telephone (515) 758-2827.