

Home improvement warning -- Ladder-related injuries increasing in the US

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Individuals using ladders are often not mindful of the severe risks associated with use. Credit: MediaSource

Falls from ladders can result in serious injury and affect people of all ages. The general public is at risk for ladder injuries, yet receives little, if any, instruction on ladder use and safety.

According to a study published in the May issue of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine and conducted by the Center for Injury Research and Policy (CIRP) at Columbus Children's Hospital, more than 2.1 million individuals were treated in U.S. emergency departments for ladder-related injuries from 1990 through 2005. That estimate exceeds an average of 136,000 cases annually. This is the first U.S. study to use national data to comprehensively examine nonfatal ladder-related injuries.

"Individuals using ladders are often not mindful of the severe risks associated with use," said the study's co-author Lara Trifiletti, PhD, MA, principal investigator in CIRP at Columbus Children's Hospital and an assistant professor at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. "Increased public health initiatives that target men and women, especially of working age, could help reduce the number of ladder-related injuries."

During the 16-year study period, the number of ladder-related injuries increased by more than 50 percent. Nearly 10 percent of injuries resulted in hospitalization or transfer to another hospital, approximately twice the admission rate of consumer product-related injuries overall. Of the cases for which location of injury was recorded, nearly all (97 percent) occurred in non-occupational settings, such as homes and farms.

Data showed ladder-related injuries most often occur to males, accounting for nearly 77 percent of the total cases. Fractures were the most common type of injury, while the legs and feet were the most frequently injured body parts.

"Given the 50 percent increase in the annual number of ladder-related injuries, the relatively high hospital admission rate, and the predominance of injuries in non-occupational settings, increased efforts are needed to prevent ladder-related injuries in and around the home," said co-author Gary Smith, MD, DrPH, director of CIRP at Columbus Children's Hospital and an associate professor at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. "Ladders should be treated with the same respect and caution as any potentially dangerous tool, such as a power saw."

Source: Columbus Children's Hospital

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