

Winter's variable temperatures make ice unsafe for children skating

COLUMBIA, Mo. – Missouri temperatures this winter have quickly plunged from almost warm into single digits. With such sudden temperature swings, parents should be alert to the dangers of thin ice before allowing children to skate on the nearest pond or lake.

The ice should be checked and be at least four inches thick for safe skating. Even then, remember that ice thickness is not consistent, said Karen Funkenbusch, safety specialist at the University of Missouri.

“A good thing to remember is that there is no such thing as safe ice. Water currents, particularly around narrow spots, bridges, inlets and outlets, are suspect for thin ice,” she said. “An indoor rink is really the safest place to skate.”

It's a good idea to contact your local police or park and recreation department to find out which bodies of water are safe for skating.

Never allow a child to skate alone, she said. Always have at least two people including an adult present. Beware of ice around submerged objects such as trees, logs, brush, embankments or dam structures.

Do not skate after dark and do not gather in large groups on one spot, she said. If you see someone fall through the ice, call the rescue squad immediately, but don't go out on the ice yourself. It's a good idea to have a rope, ladder or pole available that can be extended to a victim in an emergency.

Skaters should be aware of the danger of hypothermia or drop in body temperature, which can set in rapidly for anyone who has fallen through the ice.

In addition to the danger of falling through thin ice, children can be injured by falls, collisions or sprains. More than 15,000 children ages five to 14 are treated each year in hospital emergency room for injuries related to ice skating, according to the National Safety Council.

Children should be taught to skate in the same direction as the crowd, avoid darting across the ice, and throw away gum or candy before skating on the ice.

Ankle sprains are common. Select skates that fit the child and not ones that he or she can grow into. Oversized skates are wobbly and more likely to cause a fall or sprain, Funkenbusch said.