



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Watch Your Head

Brain Injury Awareness Month — March 2014

Recorded: March 18, 2014; posted: March 20, 2014

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Brain injuries can happen in a car, at home, on the playground, or while playing sports; they can result in severe disability and even death.

Dr. Chris Taylor is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. He's joining us today to discuss the dangers of brain injuries. Welcome to the show, Chris.

[Dr. Taylor] Thank you, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Chris, let's start by giving us a basic definition of brain injury.

[Dr. Taylor] Brain injuries are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or a penetrating head trauma which disrupts the normal function of the brain.

[Dr. Gaynes] How common are brain injuries in the U.S.?

[Dr. Taylor] In 2010, more than two and a half million traumatic brain injuries occurred. That's at least four brain injuries every minute.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are certain age groups at higher risk for brain injury?

[Dr. Taylor] Well, a brain injury can happen to anyone. Falls are a leading cause of brain injuries and children under four years of age and adults older than 65 are at higher risk for brain injury due to falls. Additionally, young adults 15 to 24 are also at an increased risk, mostly due to motor vehicle crashes.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the symptoms of a brain injury?

[Dr. Taylor] Symptoms of a brain injury can include headache, difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly, a sensitivity to light or noise, being more nervous than usual or feeling irritable, a loss of consciousness, or having trouble with sleep. Now, not everyone with a brain injury will experience all of these symptoms and some people with brain injury may experience additional symptoms. Some symptoms may appear right away, but others may not be noticed for days or even months after an injury. It is important to remember that people with brain injury may *look* fine, even if they are acting or feeling differently.

[Dr. Gaynes] When does a person need to get *immediate* medical attention for a brain injury?

[Dr. Taylor] Adults and adolescents should seek immediate medical attention after a head injury if they have a headache that gets worse or does not go away; weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination; repeated vomiting or nausea; slurred speech; or if they exhibit unusual behavior, including confusion; or have a loss of consciousness or have convulsions or seizures. Immediate medical attention should be sought for young children if they will not stop crying and cannot be consoled or if they will not nurse or eat.

[Dr. Gaynes] Chris, what are some strategies for preventing brain injuries?

[Dr. Taylor] It's important to remember that brain injuries *are* preventable. A brain injury can be the result of many unfortunate events, including falls, motor vehicle crashes, or being struck by a person or object during a sport-related activity. Adults driving or riding in a car should be properly buckled in a seat belt. Children should be buckled in an age- and size-appropriate car seat, booster seat, or seat belt in the back seat. Young children should be supervised around fall hazards, such as stairs or playground equipment. Persons involved in sports should wear a properly fitted and maintained helmet and follow the safety rules of the sport. Older adults at risk for falls can begin an exercise program to improve balance and agility, get annual eye check-ups, and make their home safer by removing tripping hazards, installing grab bars in the bathroom, and insuring good lighting, especially on stairs.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about brain injuries?

[Dr. Taylor] Listeners can go to cdc.gov/traumaticbraininjury, all one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Chris. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Chris Taylor about ways to prevent brain injuries.

Remember, brain injuries *can* be prevented. *Everyone* needs to be properly buckled up while driving or riding in a car. For older adults, who are at greatest risk for falls, a regular exercise program can improve balance and agility. During sports, it's important to wear a properly fitted and maintained helmet and follow the safety rules.

Until next time, be well. This is your host Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.