

# IU study: Home trampolines cause 1 million ER visits

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Boing, boing, boing ... OWW! could be the anthem of the trampoline jumper — and that's a good reason to ban the things, an Indiana University researcher says.

A new study from an IU School of Medicine researcher finds that from 2002 to 2011, accidents on backyard trampolines accounted for nearly 289,000 visits to emergency rooms for broken bones. Factor in all accidents, not just fractures, and the tally rises to more than 1 million ER visits, according to the study published online in the [Journal of Pediatric Orthopaedics](http://journals.lww.com/pedorthopaedics/Pages/default.aspx) (<http://journals.lww.com/pedorthopaedics/Pages/default.aspx>).

"We are inundated with injuries," said Dr. Randall T. Loder, chairman of orthopedic surgery at IU and the study's lead author. "Kids need to be healthy and active, but this is not the way to do it."

His study, the first to look at fractures related to trampoline use nationwide, found that over 10 years, trampolines caused an estimated 288,876 fractures, at a cost of more than \$400 million. Trampoline injuries overall led to more than \$1 billion in emergency room visits.

Loder, a surgeon at [Riley Hospital](http://iuhealth.org/riley/) (<http://iuhealth.org/riley/>) for Children at IU Health, decided to do the study after seeing an increase in the number of patients with fractures suffered in backyard trampoline accidents.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](http://www.aap.org/) (<http://www.aap.org/>) has recommended against backyard trampolines since 1999, and many homeowner insurance policies either prohibit them or have a clear exclusion for trampoline injuries. That doesn't stop parents from purchasing them.

And some, like Mark Publicover, dispute how dangerous trampolines are. Publicover invented the trampoline safety enclosure about 15 years ago and founded [JumpSport](http://www.jumpsport.com/) (<http://www.jumpsport.com/>) Inc., a San Jose-based trampoline company.

If you compare the number of hours children spend jumping on trampolines compared with the time they spend in other activities such as biking or swimming in backyard pools or playing on swing sets, trampolines cause much fewer injuries, Publicover said.

"If you look at all of the high-energy activities kids can play in, trampolines end up being pretty much the safest things that they can do," said Publicover, who broke his leg on an earlier-generation trampoline.

Even Carmel personal injury lawyer Jason Reese of the firm [Wagner Reese](http://www.injuryattorneys.com/) (<http://www.injuryattorneys.com/>) has one in his yard.

Eight years ago he purchased a trampoline for his three kids, now 14, 11 and 9; two years ago, he replaced it with a large one he considers safer. He also hires an inspector to check the net once a year.

Strict rules govern the use of the Reese family's trampoline: No more than four kids at a time. A parent must be home. Don't bounce against the safety net. And no one is to go airborne.

Neighborhood kids often come over to bounce, though the Reese family is far from the only one in their neighborhood with a trampoline. His kids use the backyard trampoline almost daily.

The only injuries from their trampoline? A few bloody noses.

"For the most part, like any other parenting thing, it comes down to supervision," Reese said. "You can do it safely."

Nonetheless, he's amazed at what he sees in other people's backyards, from trampolines that have no nets, to those that sit on uneven surfaces to trampolines with decaying mats that provide iffy support.

According to Loder's study, which included data from 100 hospitals nationwide, the number of injuries peaked in 2004 with about 110,000. Since then, the number has slowly dropped to an estimated 80,000 injuries in 2011.

Safety enclosures like the one Publicover invented, now standard on trampolines, no doubt have had much to do with the reduction in injuries, he said.

By 2004, 75 percent of trampolines had safety enclosures. At the same time, sales had gone from 600,000 a year just a few years back to 1.2 million, Publicover said.

Doctors, however, would prefer to see fewer injuries.

“Whether it’s 80,000 or 100,000, that’s still a huge number of totally preventable injuries,” Loder said. “The way to prevent it is not to go on it at all. There are lots of other ways to get exercise.”

The most common trampoline-related injury that Loder sees at Riley is an elbow fracture. Knee fractures that threaten growth plates also are common, he said.

On average, patients were 9, though those who have injuries of the spine, head, ribs and sternum — accounting for 4 percent of the injuries seen — had an average age of nearly 17, perhaps because they are bigger and can jump harder.

The study looked only at backyard trampolines and did not include trampoline parks, such as the popular SkyZone. Almost all of the fractures, 95 percent, happened at the injured person’s home.

Loder does not question the appeal of trampolines, just the risk.

“I’m sure they’re fun,” he said. “There’s no doubt about it that they’re fun. They’re fun up until the time they get the injury.”

Call Star reporter Shari Rudavsky at (317) 444-6354. Follow her on Twitter: @srudavsky.

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