

Children using motorbikes risk death and respiratory infections

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The desire to have children acquire quality education is pushing many parents to send their children to schools far from home. However, the shortage or lack of school buses has resulted in parents hiring vans while those who are financially disadvantaged have resolved to use motorcycles.

In Kisumu town, for example, many motorcycles carrying small children meander irresponsibly between speeding matatus, trucks and private cars as they rush to get to school on time.

Most of the motorcyclists do not have headgear or heavy jackets for their clients hence in case of accidents, the passengers are at high risk of sustaining serious injuries or even dying.

Some of these children are so young that they cannot hold to the motorcyclist and can easily fall off.

According to Dr Ojwang Lusi, Kisumu County Director of Medical Services, children always sustain serious injuries in case of such accidents as they are not in a position to escape.

“Some of these children are even too young that they doze off on the motorbikes and can easily slip and fall down,” said Lusi.

The most dangerous bit of it is the health effect. Dr Lusi said the cold air, which the children are exposed to, makes them vulnerable to respiratory infections — a chronic condition later on in their lives.

Dr Lusi says the excessive cold air taken in by the children makes the lungs vulnerable to severe lung complications such as pneumonia.

Yusuf Okoth, a parent and resident of Mamboleo stopped ferrying his children to Victoria Primary School, 12km away from his house.

Okoth had chosen this mode of transport to avoid delays caused by the traffic jam along Kisumu-Kakamega Road. He had hired a motorcyclist to ferry them to and from school daily.

He says constant complaints by the children over cold around their chest area became common, forcing him to withdraw the idea.

Even though he has meagre earnings, he has resolved to pay Sh2,000 per month for each child to use the school's transport system. "Since they started using the van, I have not heard them complain about chest pains," says Okoth.

According to Kisumu County Director of Education, Sylvestre Mulambe, most parents expose their children to such conditions due to ignorance or inadequate resources to use decent means to take their children to school.

Chairman of Nyanza Parents Association Jackson Gweno, however, blames the tuition programme for forcing children to report to school very early and leave late in the evening.

Dr Juliana Otieno, Medical Superintendent New Nyanza Provincial Hospital says the cold air is more dangerous to small children than older people.

"Cold causes airway hyper-responsiveness, which is quick narrowing of a child's airways, making it hard for him to breathe," said Otieno.

She says the situation makes children vulnerable to reactive airways disease — a term used to describe breathing problems common with children up to five years of age.