Are Roller Coasters Safe?

Zooming down a hill, you feel the wind rushing in your face. Seconds later, you are hanging upside down! You are riding a roller coaster. But are you safe?

New roller coasters are getting bigger, faster, and scarier. Millions of kids and adults take these thrill rides each year. Some **experts**[1] worry that the rides' sudden twists and turns are unsafe.

High-speed coasters whip riders' heads back and forth. One report blamed coasters for 13 brain injuries from 1995 to 2000. Another report says some people have nearly died from coaster-related brain injuries.

A Safety Study

Recently, two scientists set out to learn if coasters really do cause brain injuries. They studied the effects of riding three of the fastest coasters in the United States. The scientists say the coasters' twists and turns are not fast enough to cause brain injuries.

"People take more than 1 billion rides on roller coasters each year. The reports on brain injury are few and not proven," said Douglas Smith. He is one of the scientists who did the new study.

Coasters and Kids

Some experts do not think the new study proves coasters are safe--especially for kids. They say the scientists studied only how coasters affect adults, not kids. They want a new study.

Edward Markey is a government official. Recently, he asked a group of experts to include children in their next study about roller coaster safety. Results from that study will be reported next year. Roller coasters have to be studied to make sure that "riders of all ages" are safe, Markey said.

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1 **expert:** one who has special skill or knowledge gained from training or experience

Roller Coaster Fun Facts

• The idea for the roller coaster began with the ice slide. It was invented in Russia more than 500 years ago.

• There are more than 1,400 roller coasters in the world today.

• The fastest roller coaster in the world is in Japan. It speeds down a track at more than 100 miles per hour.