

Home Is Where the Harm Is: Peloton Treadmill Injuries

09.16.2021

In March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic swept across the globe with a ferocity not experienced in our lifetimes, and governments responded by issuing stay-at-home orders and closing various businesses in an effort to curb the spread of this deadly virus. Gyms closed, exercise and yoga classes were canceled, stadiums shuttered, and team sports were suspended as much of society hunkered down. As it became clear that the pandemic was here to stay, countless Americans began working from home, schooling from home, and exercising at home. Sales of home exercise equipment skyrocketed.

Peloton, famous for its high-tech exercise bikes and treadmills, saw its stock price increase from \$22 per share to \$160 per share from March to December 2020, making it a \$34 billion company. But as companies like Peloton saw a meteoric rise in their pandemic-fueled business, it was accompanied by a troubling surge in serious injuries and incidents caused by home exercise equipment malfunction or unsafe design. Do we really need another excuse **not** to exercise?

Peloton Treadmills Turn Deadly

Peloton makes two treadmills, the Peloton Tread+ and the Peloton Tread. Both feature the same type of impressive HD touchscreen and streaming instructor-led workouts that attract so many consumers to the Peloton Bike+ and Peloton Bike.

These are not just your run-of-the-mill treadmills. Peloton sells its cycling machines and treadmills as state-of-the-art exercise equipment that can be connected online to virtual live and on-demand fitness classes. The Tread+ Treadmills sell for more than \$4,295. Unfortunately, while the 32 inch HD touchscreen is amazing (as is the huge price tag), the Peloton Tread+ has a 67-inch “shock-absorbing slat belt” that has trapped, injured, and killed a number of unsuspecting consumers.

In March 2021, a 6-year-old child died after being sucked under the Peloton Tread+ Treadmill. According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Peloton is aware of at least 70 other reports of the same thing happening with children, adults, pets, and other objects. At least 29 of those incidents involved serious injuries to children, including second- and third-degree abrasions, broken bones, and lacerations. In another case (the only incident previously disclosed in a public database of injury reports), a 3-year-old boy was found trapped under a Peloton Tread+ by his father in February 2021. The boy was not breathing and had no pulse, and survived with significant brain

injuries, the report said.

Peloton appears to have applied the “open concept” to its Tread+ Treadmills, leaving the revolving running deck open and unprotected at the rear roller as it travels underneath the machine to make another pass. All it takes is one look at the design of the rear portion of the Tread+ treadmill to see the potential dangers.

Indeed, the CPSC released a harrowing home video that shows how easily a toddler can get pulled underneath the running deck of the treadmill. Thankfully, this time, the toddler seems to escape relatively unscathed, thanks to the serendipity of carrying an exercise ball into the experience. As the video shows, even as the treadmill tips and rocks from the toddler being stuck beneath it—clearly not something that could or should happen in the course of normal use—the conveyor belt continues its unrelenting pace. The Tread+ has a maximum running speed of 12.5 mph.

On April 17, 2021, because of the mounting incidents involving children becoming entrapped, pinned, and pulled under the rear roller of the treadmill, the CPSC issued an urgent warning to consumers about the dangers of the Peloton Tread+ Treadmill. In its warning, the CPSC advised consumers to stop using the treadmills if there are small children or pets at home. Peloton initially fought the CPSC’s request for the company to recall the treadmills, and delayed the agency’s investigation into the safety problems. But, by early May 2021, Peloton announced the recall of approximately 125,000 Tread+ Treadmills.

The Peloton Tread+ appears to lack safety measures that are not only common sense, but easily implemented and required by national and international standards. In particular, ASTM Specification F2115-19 covers the parameters for the design and manufacture of motorized treadmills.

Treadmill Design Standards

ASTM Specification F2115-19 is surprisingly comprehensive, and includes the following requirements that should be assessed in any treadmill injury case:

1. the treadmill must be stable during intended use;
2. its edges, in accessible areas, shall be free of burrs and sharp edges;
3. its corners, in accessible areas, shall be radiused or chamfered;
4. the design of rotating parts shall avoid shear, pinch, or catch points by guarding, shielding, spacing, or other appropriate means;
5. to reduce the risk of finger entrapment, the rear roller of the treadmill shall be designed or guarded;

6. the guard or design shall function through the full range of inclination possible, and through the full range of belt tension adjustment;
7. foot rails and handrails shall be present in all treadmills to facilitate user mounting and dismounting;
8. its moving surface shall be constructed to minimize foot slippage;
9. the control panel for the operation of the treadmill shall be readily accessible by the user;
10. the controls for a motorized treadmill shall incorporate a prominently labeled and user accessible stop switch;
11. the stop switch causes the moving surface to decelerate and stop and stops the motion of any power-driven incline system;
12. stop mechanisms may include a push-button stop switch, a pull cord stop switch, an infrared beam switch, or other suitable means; and
13. adequate warnings alerting users, third parties, and service personnel to hazards associated with treadmills shall be provided.

Given these detailed standards, treadmills simply should not be so hazardous. Yet, in 2019 alone, there were an estimated 22,500 treadmill-related injuries treated at U.S. emergency departments – including around 2,000 involving children under 8-years-old, according to the CPSC. In total, the agency received reports of 17 deaths associated with treadmills from 2018 to 2020.

The last thing that any parent should have to worry about when they purchase a piece of home exercise equipment to improve their fitness is whether it might one day grab and kill their child. And no one needs another excuse not to exercise.

This article was previously published in the Attorneys Information Exchange Group (AIEG) Magazine on September 1, 2021.

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