

Schumacher injury brings off-piste skiing dangers to light

By Tom de Castella, BBC

Former F1 champion Michael Schumacher is fighting for his life in a French hospital after suffering a head injury in an off-piste skiing accident.

How dangerous is off-piste skiing?

Schumacher was wearing a helmet, which experts say may have prevented him dying in the immediate aftermath.

Skiing itself is far safer than cycling or swimming, per million participants, says Dr. Mike Langran, a GP who founded the website ski-injury.com. The risk is "in the order of two to four injuries per 1,000 days spent on the slopes," he says.

But is venturing off-piste more dangerous? There are no comprehensive statistics as it's impossible to know how many people are skiing off-piste at any one time, experts say. Off-piste refers to any area not marked out and maintained for use by skiers.

Off-piste slopes are not groomed by snowplows, so rocks, precipices and cliffs may not be easy to spot, especially in poor visibility. But the biggest risk is avalanches.

In the past two days alone, seven people have died in the Alps from avalanches.

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