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On the road to recovery . . . Liam McDonnell (left) and Matthew Boersen with plastic surgeon Murray Beagley in Middlemore Hospital children's ward.

Boys on the mend after mower accident

Auckland: Two boys who suffered horrific leg injuries after falling under ride-on lawnmowers might not be running around at the beach before Christmas, but are recovering well after surgeons saved their damaged limbs.

Liam McDonnell (4) and Matthew Boersen (3) each faced the prospect of having part of a leg amputated after losing large amounts of skin and muscle in the accidents, which happened within weeks of each other.

Luckily for both boys, the nerves in their legs were left

intact, allowing a team of surgeons at KidzFirst, Middlemore Hospital, to perform an intricate operation to rebuild the boys' legs using a muscle from their chests.

But the accidents have prompted calls for people to be careful around ride-on mowers and the boys' parents hope the publicity will prevent more children being injured.

Julianne McDonnell said her son's right leg had been torn to "ribbons", the bones shattered.

"I just thought his leg was gone. When the doctors said 'We will save it', I couldn't believe it, having seen the injury in the first place."

A week ago, Mrs McDonnell was getting dinner ready as Liam raced around the lawn. Next door, the neighbour was mowing his lawn, which merges with the McDonnells' property in the Coromandel.

"The chap goes forwards then backwards on the lawn. Liam has run behind him as he was going backwards. It's just an accident, but horrible."

Weeks earlier, Matthew Boersen was playing on the trampoline at his family's dairy farm at Matatoki in Thames, when he fell off into the path of a ride-on mower driven by his older sister. He lost part of the heel bone, muscle, and skin

from his left leg.

For plastic surgeon Murray Beagley, who deals with numerous mower injuries, particularly in spring, the injuries were the worst he had seen, but using a technique called free flap muscle transfer, the boys' legs were able to be reconstructed.

Mr Beagley said the surgery using microscopes, was delicate, exacting work as the artery and vein measured about 1.5mm in diameter.

He believed both boys would hardly notice the loss of their chest muscle as other muscle in the shoulder area would compensate for it. — NZAP