

Bicycle Safety

Knowing the rules of bicycle safety is important so your child can avoid a serious injury. Here are some facts about bicycle injuries:

- Children ages 5 to 14 have a higher rate of bicycle injuries than older riders.
- Bicycle injuries in younger children most often result from errors they have made.
- Injuries to the face and head are the most severe injuries for bicyclists.
- Fatal injuries are most often caused when a cyclist crosses an intersection without looking for cars, or by drivers who have been drinking alcohol.
- Children are at risk for injury no matter where they are riding. One study found the same severity of injuries among children bicycling in their own neighborhood as older children using the bicycle as a means of transportation.

If your child is learning to ride or already rides a bicycle, here are several safety points that you should consider.

Know the Rules

Bicycle rules need to be appropriate for the age of the child. Children should not ride in the street until they demonstrate a good understanding and ability to follow the rules of bicycling.

General safety rules:

- Always wear a helmet.
- Always wear protective shoes (no bare feet or sandals).
- Avoid riding at dusk or at night. If a child must ride at night, proper bicycle lights and reflective clothing are important.
- Never carry another passenger on the bicycle.

Street safety rules:

- Ride in a single file and only in the direction of traffic.
- Ride in a straight line while near the curb.
- Always obey stoplights and stop signs.
- Never assume that the driver of a car sees you at an intersection.
- Use good balance and steering, proper hand signals, and brakes safely.
- Get off the bicycle safely.
- Look behind you when you turn across a traffic lane.

Children frequently do not learn or have the skills needed to ride on the street until age 10. Even after this age, you should periodically check your child's skills. Check to see if your child pays attention to potential obstacles or dangers such as rocks, tree limbs, and cars exiting driveways or alleys.

Wear a Bicycle Helmet

Helmets are very effective in reducing the risk of serious head injury or death as a result of bicycle accidents. Get a bicycle helmet before your child takes his first bicycle ride. Even a child riding in a bicycle carrier should wear a helmet. A child should always wear a helmet every time she gets onto a bicycle.

Parents can do a lot to encourage a child to wear a helmet. Some ways include:

- Always wear a helmet yourself when you are riding a bicycle and make an effort to ride with your child.
- Allow your child to pick out his or her own helmet.
- Buy some stickers to "jazz up" a helmet.
- Praise your child for wearing the helmet and address her concern when the helmet does not fit properly.
- Always insist that your child put on a helmet before he or she gets onto a bicycle. If your child breaks this rule, remove bicycle privileges for 1 week.

Choose a Proper Bicycle Size and Type

Having the right size of bicycle is important for the safety of your child. Children riding bicycles that are too big for them are injured more often than children with the proper size of bike. Never buy or allow the use of a bicycle that the child will "grow into."

A child should be able to touch both feet on the ground comfortably when standing over the bicycle. The top bar of the bicycle should be at least 1 inch below the crotch while the child is standing. Your child should be able to reach the handlebars comfortably while sitting on the bicycle seat in an upright posture.

Children just learning to ride on streets should use a bike with foot brakes because they require less coordination for safe use. Children who can safely ride on roadways can use bicycles that require more coordination (such as those with hand brakes and manual gear shifts).

Maintain Your Bicycle

A child or parent should regularly check the bicycle's brakes and tire pressure. If the bicycle has rapid release hubs, check the hubs before each ride. Bicycles with damaged parts such as wheels, spokes, or handlebars should be repaired before they are used again.