



Safe Bicycling

Bicycling is one of the most popular ways to get around, whether for recreation, sport or transportation. An estimated 73 to 85 million Americans ride bikes ranging from high performance, 18-speed, touring models, to "dirt bikes" equipped with balloon tires—and dozens of variations in between.

With millions of cyclists on the roads—the same roads occupied by millions of motor vehicles that are larger, heavier and faster than bikes—the National Safety Council believes that defensive driving applies to people who pedal with their feet to travel, as well as to those who push on the gas pedal. Approximately 700 bicyclists were killed and 540,000 visited the emergency room with injuries in 2007. Taking precautions in traffic and wearing protective equipment are a cyclist's best shields against unintentional injuries.

The Council offers the following tips for safe and enjoyable bicycling:

- Obey traffic rules. Get acquainted with ordinances. Cyclists must follow the same rules as motorists.
- Know your bike's capabilities. Remember that bicycles differ from motor vehicles; they're smaller and can't move as fast. But, they can change direction more easily, stop faster and move through smaller spaces.
- Ride in single file with traffic, not against it. Bicycling two abreast can be dangerous. Bicyclists should stay as far right on the pavement as possible, watching for opening car doors, sewer gratings, soft shoulders, broken glass and other debris. Remember to keep a safe distance from the vehicle ahead.
- Make safe turns and cross intersections with care. Signal turns half a block before the intersection, using the correct hand signals (left arm straight out for left turn; forearm up for right turn). When traffic is heavy and the cyclist has to turn left, it is best to dismount and walk the bicycle across both streets at the crosswalks.
- Never hitch on cars. A sudden stop or turn could send the cyclist flying into the path of another vehicle.
- Before riding into traffic: stop, look left, right, left again, and over your shoulder.
- Always be seen. During the day, cyclists should wear bright clothing. Nighttime cycling is not advised, but if riding at night is necessary, retro reflective clothing, designed to bounce back motorists' headlight beams, will make cyclists more visible.
- Make sure the bicycle has the right safety equipment: a red rear reflector; a white front reflector; a red or colorless spoke reflector on the rear wheel; an amber or colorless reflector on the front wheel; pedal reflectors; a horn or bell; and a rear view mirror. A bright headlight is recommended for night riding.

- Wear a **helmet**. Head injuries cause about two-thirds of all bicycling fatalities. The Council strongly urges all cyclists to wear helmets. The first body part to fly forward in a collision is usually the head, and with nothing but skin and bone to protect the brain from injury, the results can be disastrous.
- In March 1999, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) issued a uniform, mandatory federal safety standard for all bike helmets. All helmets manufactured or imported for sale in the U.S. must carry a label or sticker stating that they meet the requirements of the new standard. Cyclists who currently have a helmet that meets the ASTM, ANSI or Snell standards do not need to rush out to buy a new one; these helmets provide adequate protection. However, when it's time to replace a helmet because it has been outgrown or damaged in a crash, buying a helmet that meets the CPSC standard is recommended. The helmet should fit securely and should be worn low and near the eyebrows—not back on the forehead.

A properly designed helmet has four characteristics:

1. a stiff outer shell designed to distribute impact forces and protect against sharp objects;
2. an energy-absorbing liner at least one-half inch thick;
3. a chin strap and fastener to keep the helmet in place; and
4. it should be lightweight, cool in hot weather and fit comfortably.

There is no limit to the fun and exercise gained from bicycling. Being careful will give riders safer trips and a greater peace of mind.