

May 8 is National Bike to School (or Work) Day—Bike Helmets are the First Step to Safety



With warmer weather finally approaching, it is time for more people to be outside. Walking, biking and running outside are great exercises to promote a healthy lifestyle.

However, when people are doing these activities, they often have to share the road with vehicles. Therefore, adults and kids are at risk for an accident with a motor vehicle.

The first thing we adults can do for pretty much anything we want our kids to do for their health and safety is be a good example. If we want our kids to choose healthy foods, then we probably better be choosing healthy foods. If we want our kids to be safe on their bike, scooter, skateboard or skates, then we probably better be wearing a helmet ourselves when doing those activities.

“Medical research shows that a bicycle helmet can prevent up to 85 percent of cyclists’ head injuries. More than 700 bicycle riders are killed in the U.S. every year—almost all in collisions with cars—and 75 percent of them die of head injuries” (Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute).

Even if a child survives a bicycle injury, they still may never be the same. A child may have personality changes, learning disabilities, concentration difficulties, aggressiveness, headaches and balance problems from a brain injury.

I can only imagine the anguish a parent would go through in either outcome after a bicycle accident. It is so evident as to how a bike helmet can prevent injury and death that there is some form of mandatory child bicycle helmet legislation, especially for children less than the age of 15.

Extension Corner

Written by Tracy Trumper

Colorado, however, is not one of the 22 states, with the District of Columbia and over 201 localities, that have enacted some form of legislation.

So, here are some quick reminders by the Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute:

—you always need a helmet wherever you ride. You can expect to crash in your next 4,500 miles of riding or maybe much sooner than that!

—even low-speed falls on a bicycle trail can scramble our brains.

—make sure your helmet fits to get all the protection you are paying for. A good fit means level on your head, touching all around, comfortably snug but not tight. The helmet should not move more than about an inch in any direction, and must not pull off no matter how hard you try.

—the cheaper helmets are just as good as the more expensive ones.

—standards are no longer a big issue in the U.S. market, but check inside for a CPSC sticker (Consumer Product Safety Commission).

—children under 1 should not be riding, and toddlers should be able to hold their head up with a helmet on.

—pick white or bright colors for visibility to be sure that motorists and other cyclists can see you.

—common sense tells you to avoid a helmet with snag points sticking out, a squared-off shell, inadequate vents, excessive vents and extreme “aero” shape, dark colors, thin straps, complicated adjustments or a rigid visor that could snag in a fall. If the helmet “snags” on the pavement then a neck injury could result.

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—remember to never let a child play on the playground with a helmet on. It could get caught on something and choke the child.

Because children are still developing physically, cognitively and mentally, the parents or guardians have to prepare children to handle traffic. Children act differently in traffic than adults. For instance,

—children have a narrower field of vision than adults, about one-third less.

—children cannot easily judge a car's speed and distance.

—children assume that if they see a car, the driver must see them.

—children cannot readily tell the direction a sound is coming from.

—children concentrate on only one thing at a time, and it is unlikely it is the traffic.

—children often have a limited sense of danger.

Therefore, model appropriate traffic safety practices, like wearing a bike helmet properly at all times. Only give as much independence and responsibility as the child can handle. Assess this ability by giving the child frequent supervised experiences after verbally instructing and showing the child the rules of biking.

Road rules include:

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—always ride with your hands on the handlebars.

—always stop and check for traffic in both directions when leaving your driveway, an alley or a curb.

—cross at intersections. When you pull out between parked cars, drivers can't see you coming.

—walk your bike across busy intersections using the crosswalk and following traffic signals.

—ride on the right-hand side of the street, so you travel in the same direction as cars do.

—stop at all stop signs and obey traffic lights just as cars do.

—ride single-file on the street with friends.

—children 10 and under should be on the sidewalk or on bike paths as much as possible.

Finally, yes, bikers need to be able to share the road and take responsibility for their safety. But, drivers—**SLOW DOWN AND WATCH!** There are a lot of little ones out—it would only take a second for tragedy to strike! Be safe out there, people.

Try these organizations to find out how you can get a very low-cost helmet or one for free: the Brain Injury Law Center or call 1-877-840-3431, American Children's Safety Network, American Safety ASHP, ProRider (Children-N-Safety or CNS) at info@prorider.com or J & B Importers at lcahn@jbimporters.com.

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Visit the website: www.walkbiketoschool.org to learn more about walking and biking to school programs and safety tips.

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