Bicycle Safety



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Bicycling is one of the best ways to get exercise, see the sights and reduce your carbon footprint. However, bicyclists face a host of hazards. They often must share the road with vehicles, and injuries can happen even on a designated path.

Americans are increasingly bicycling to commute, for exercise, or just for fun. By law, bicycles on the roadway are vehicles with the same rights and responsibilities as motorized vehicles.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

DAVID AND GOLIATH

In an incident between a car and a bike, the cyclist almost always will be the one with more severe injuries. Being cognizant of road hazards whether on a bike or in a vehicle can help avoid deadly encounters.

With about 80 million bicyclists sharing the road with motorized vehicles, it is vital bicyclists – and drivers – take some safety precautions.

In 2018, there were 857 bicyclists killed in motor vehicle crashes, a more than 6% increase from the year before. NHTSA's bicycle safety programs focus on the behaviors of bicyclists and motorists to reduce injuries and fatalities on our nation's roadways.

RISK OF CRASHES

Know some bicycle safety facts:

1. Regardless of the season, bicyclist deaths occurred most often between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.
2. Bicyclist deaths occur most often in urban areas (75%) compared to rural areas (25%) in 2017.
3. Bicyclist deaths were 8 times higher for males than females in 2017.
4. Alcohol was involved in 37% of all fatal bicyclist crashes in 2017.

THREE CATEGORIES

There are three categories of issues that contribute to traffic crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians: motorist behavior, non-motorist behavior, and infrastructure. Some of the issues overlap between categories.

- **Motorist** behaviors include speeding, distraction, lack of traffic law awareness, non-compliance with traffic laws, and alcohol or drug impairment.
- **Non-motorist** (i.e., pedestrian and bicyclist) behaviors include lack of traffic law awareness, non-compliance with traffic laws, poor conspicuity, and alcohol or other impairment.
- **Infrastructure** issues include inadequate separation between motorists and non-motorists, lighting, and signage or crosswalks.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

To Avoid Serious Injuries While Bike Riding Follow These Safety Tips:

- Never ride a bike without a helmet. The law requires anyone under the age of 17 to wear a properly fitted and fastened helmet, but all riders are strongly encouraged to use one. Head injuries, the most common cause of death among cyclists, can be reduced 85 percent by wearing a helmet.
- Wear bright clothing.
- Make sure your bike has reflectors. If you plan to ride at night, install a white light on the front and a red light on the rear of the bike.
- Ride single file with the flow of traffic on the right side of the road.
- Use proper turning and stopping hand signals.
- When approaching an intersection, proceed with caution, looking left, right and left again. Walk the bike across the intersection.
- Make sure the bike is regularly maintained and all equipment is working. Tires should be properly inflated, and wheels straight and secure.

Cyclists, Check Your Equipment

Always inspect your bike prior to riding.

- The seat should be adjusted to the proper height and locked in place
- Make certain all parts are secure and working properly
- Check that the tires are inflated properly
- Make sure the bike is equipped with reflectors on the rear, front, pedals and spokes
- A horn or bell, a rear-view mirror and a bright headlight also are recommended

Plan to Be Seen

Make certain drivers can see you.

- Wear neon, fluorescent or other bright clothing
- Whenever possible, ride during the day
- If you must ride at night, wear reflective clothing and use flashing lights

Wear a Helmet

Helmets appropriate for bicycling should be worn by everyone – adults and children – on every bike ride regardless of length of the ride.

Follow these guidelines to properly fit the helmet:

- Adjust sizing pads or fit ring until the helmet is snug.
- Position the helmet level on your head, covering the forehead and not tipped backward or forward; this will be about one to two finger widths above the eyebrow.
- Adjust the side straps so they form a “V” shape under and slightly in front of your ears.
- Center the buckle on the chin strap under your chin.
- Buckle and tighten the chin strap until it is snug; no more than one to two fingers should be able to fit between the chin and strap.
- When fitted, the helmet should not rock more than 1 inch side to side or front to back on your head.

TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

Bike riders can be at a disadvantage in traffic, so some caution is advised. With the following tips:

Plan your route. You don’t want to just get on your bike on Monday morning and take your usual driving route to work. Instead, work out a bike-friendly route beforehand.

Your bike route to work will probably be along side streets, bike lanes, and bike paths rather than heavily traveled “main drags.” Practice your route on your day off, and make sure you work out any tricky spots along with your new commute time.

Take advantage of public transit. If you have too far to go to bike the whole route, you may be able to use public transit for part of your trip.

Ride in the road. Beginning bikers may think sidewalks are safer, but bicycles belong—and are actually safer—in the roadway, following normal traffic rules.

Take care of your bike. If you’re not a skilled bike mechanic, keep your bike in good repair with an annual inspection at a bike shop.

Communicate. Be aware of the traffic around you, and make sure it’s aware of you. Use eye contact, hand signals, and a bike bell to let others know where you are and what you’re about to do.

Take up space. If you’re riding along a line of parked cars, you’re vulnerable to “dooming”—colliding with a car door when someone who doesn’t see you opens it. Give parked cars a wide berth, even if it means that cars driving in your lane cannot pass.

Stay in control. Riding fast puts you at greater risk of losing control. Always go slowly enough that you can stop, turn, or otherwise maneuver as needed.

Be watchful. Look out for potholes and other roadway hazards and obstructions, and give yourself enough reaction time to avoid them safely.

FINAL WORD

Cyclists are increasing in droves not only in North America but all over the world. But the dangers of cycling are evident in the statistics that bear out the injuries and fatalities. Head injuries are the most common cause of death among cyclists. The most severe injurie are those to the brain that cause permanent damage.