

Bicycle-related Head Injuries



How large a problem are bicycle-related head injuries in the United States? In 1997, 813 bicyclists were killed in crashes with motor vehicles, an increase of 7% over the previous year. Of these, 31% were riders younger than 16 years old and 97% were not wearing helmets. In 1997, an estimated 567,000 Americans sustained a bicycle-related injury that required emergency department care. Approximately two-thirds of these cyclists were children or adolescents. An estimated 140,000 children are treated each year in emergency departments for head injuries sustained while bicycling. In 1991, societal cost associated with bicycle-related head injury or death was estimated to exceed \$3 billion.

What can be done?

Riders should wear bicycle helmets every time they ride. In the event of a crash, wearing a bicycle helmet reduces the risk of serious head injury by as much as 85% and the risk for brain injury by as much as 88%. Helmets have also been shown to reduce the risk of injury to the upper and mid-face by 65%. In fact, if each rider wore a helmet, an estimated 500 bicycle-related fatalities and 151,000 nonfatal head injuries would be prevented each year—that's one death per day and one injury every four minutes. Unfortunately, estimates on helmet usage suggest that only 25% of children ages 5-14 years wear a helmet when riding. The percentage is close to zero when looking at teen riders. Children and adolescents' most common complaints are that helmets are not fashionable, or "cool", their friends don't wear them, and/or they are uncomfortable (usually too hot). Riders also say that they do not think about the importance of bike helmets, or about the need to protect themselves from injury, particularly if they are not riding in traffic. Accordingly, the national health goal for 2010 is for 50% of teenage bicyclists in 9th-12th grade to wear helmets.



How can you help prevent injuries while bicycling?

- *Wear a bicycle helmet every time you ride. A bicycle helmet is a necessity, not an accessory. Wear your bicycle helmet correctly. A bicycle helmet should fit comfortably and snugly, but not too tightly. It should sit on top of your head in a level position, and it should not rock forward and back or from side to side. Always keep the helmet buckled. Only buy a bicycle helmet if it meets or exceeds the safety standards developed by the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

- *Learn the rules of the road and obey all traffic laws. Ride with the traffic, on the right side of the road. Use appropriate hand signals. Respect traffic signals, which are meant for riders as well as drivers.

- *Stop at all intersections, not just those intersections with pedestrian markings. Stop and look both ways before entering a street.

- *Children should not ride in the street until they are 10 years old, demonstrate good riding skills, and are able to observe the basic rules of the road. And, of course, children should always wear helmets when they ride.