

Safe Cycling

Cycling is popular with Canadians of all ages. Most Canadian children 12 and under ride bikes. In addition, many adults ride bicycles to keep fit, for recreation and for transportation.

Overall, bicycling is a safe and enjoyable activity for riders of all ages who respect the rules of the road and keep a safety conscious attitude.

Bicycle crashes have gone down in line with the general drop in traffic fatalities. Statistically, a cyclist is safer than motor vehicle driver or passenger - plus cycling offers positive health benefits.

Risk and the Adult Rider

In 2001, there were 60 bicycle fatalities, representing 2.2 per cent of all vehicle fatalities in Canada. Of these, 36 per cent were age 19 and under, and 64 per cent were over 19. Twenty years ago, in 1984, the proportion was exactly the opposite: there were 138 fatalities, 64 per cent of which were 19 and under, and 36 per cent were over 19.

Helmet use is one key factor in the decreased injuries and fatalities for young people and the increase among adult cyclists.



A 2002 Canada Safety Council survey found that while four out of five parents say their kids wear helmets when cycling or in-line skating, over half of adult cyclists admit they don't wear a helmet when they ride. Among those 19 and under, all but one of the 21 fatalities was not wearing a helmet. There were almost twice as many adult fatalities, and a much higher percentage (16 per cent) were unhelmeted.

Alcohol use is another factor in adult cyclist fatalities. A study by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation, covering 1987 to 1997, found that 25 per cent of fatally injured cyclists had been drinking.

The lower rate of deaths and injuries for child cyclists is good news. Community bike safety programs and helmet use deserve much credit for this improvement.

But why has the proportion of adult casualties gone up? Demographics are likely a factor; the under-20 age group is now a smaller part of the population than it was 15 or 20 years ago. Nonetheless, adult cyclists cannot be complacent about safety. There is certainly room for improvement. Head injuries, which account for an estimated two-thirds of cyclist fatalities, can be largely prevented by wearing a helmet.

Would fewer adults be killed in bike crashes if more wore a helmet? The Canada Safety Council believes the answer is yes. Comparative eye injury rates for child and adult hockey players show the value of protective equipment. Helmets are designed to reduce the risk of permanent injury or death in the event of a fall or crash.

About 90 per cent of cycling fatalities are caused by cyclists being struck by motor vehicles. Children usually ride within their own community. Adult cyclists are more likely to ride in heavy traffic or less-than-ideal weather conditions. For instance, individuals who cycle to work or tour long distances increase their exposure to the hazards of traffic. Intersections can be particularly challenging.

Common sense dictates reducing your exposure to these hazards as much as possible. Often an alternate route can help you avoid heavy traffic. Travelling on a back road or bicycle trail might be less direct, but you will likely find it safer and more enjoyable. If weather creates difficult conditions, delay your outing or take alternate transportation.



Use Road Smarts

A bicycle is classified as a vehicle which belongs on the road. Cyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as drivers of motor vehicles. You must obey the same rules of the road when riding your bike as you do when driving your car.

Traffic laws help road users predict each other's actions. Cyclists, like motorists, must ride on the right side of the road, be sober, stop for stop signs and red lights, signal turns, and yield to traffic that has the right-of-way.

In addition, bicycle-related laws cover specific safety issues. Bicycles, as one of the smallest vehicles on the road, must be seen and heard. Since bikes are quiet vehicles, you must be equipped with a working bell or horn to announce your approach. Reflective tape, reflectors and a front light make you more visible to other road users. Consider these laws as a minimum. **In Prince Edward Island, the law requires that you always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, regardless of age.**

Always ride defensively, anticipating the actions of other road users to avoid a collision and staying alert for all hazards. A car door could open at any time. A pedestrian or animal could dart onto the road without warning. Debris, grates or holes in the road could make you veer or crash.



Wet or cold weather can make riding treacherous. If you must ride in those conditions, be aware of the challenges and handle your bike accordingly.

Whether it's daylight, dawn, dusk or dark, make yourself easy to see. One of the reasons motorists often give for hitting cyclists is that they did not notice them. A cyclist may be hard to spot from far away when a vehicle is travelling relatively fast. When the sun is very low, cyclists and motorists can be momentarily blinded by the glare.

Bright clothing catches people's attention in the daytime - the brighter the better. If you must ride at night, go beyond the required reflectors and front light. Wear clothing made with retro-reflective material, or retro-reflective tape on your clothing, to ensure you can be seen.

Protect your head by wearing a CSA-approved bicycle helmet; other types of sport helmets won't do, as they are designed for different types of impact. The helmet should fit snugly, level and square on the forehead with the front covering the forehead. If it has been in a collision, it has done its job. Replace it.

Safety Tips for the Road

Knowing and obeying traffic rules and signals are the first steps to safer cycling. Common sense and courtesy are important when sharing the road with others.

1. Don't ride in a car's blind spot. Stay far enough ahead or behind so the driver can see you.
2. Don't try passing a moving car on the right-hand side.

3. Don't ride in the right-turn only lane when you want to continue going straight ahead.
4. Don't ride the wrong way down the street. Drivers only look where they expect to see other traffic.
5. Don't swerve between parked cars.
6. Do stay behind cars making a right turn at an intersection. If it's safe, shoulder check, then signal to pass on the left.
7. Do ride far enough away from parked cars to make sure you won't be hit by a car door opening unexpectedly.
8. Do wear clothes that are suited to the weather conditions. Wear shoes and gloves. Keep your pant legs tied or clipped to avoid being caught in the chain or wear biking shorts.
9. Do wear light-colored clothes at all times. Use lights and reflectors at night or when the weather is rainy or foggy. Put retro-reflective stickers on your bike and helmet to make sure others can see you.
10. Do always obey the traffic signals and never wear headphones while operating a bicycle.
11. Do use racks and packs to carry parcels. Never carry passengers. Equip your bike with carry racks and/or saddlebags. Wear a knapsack to carry books, etc. with you.
12. Do write down your bike's serial number and keep this number at home. Always lock your bike securely in a safe place.
14. Do always ride on the right side of the road. See and be seen.

Is Your Bike Safe?

First, your bicycle must fit you correctly. If it's too big or too small, you won't be able to control it adequately. You should be able to straddle it comfortably with both feet on the ground.

Next, keep it well maintained. Check it regularly to be sure it is safe to ride.



- Are the brakes adjusted properly, with brake pads and cables in good condition?
- Is the chain clean and oiled? (On ten-speeds, a chain that sags means the rear derailleur needs repair.)
- Do all the gears work well?
- Are all bolts tight?
- Are the wheels centred and secure?
- Are the tires in good condition with the right amount of air pressure?
- Do you have an emergency tool kit? Be prepared in case a tire goes flat or a screw comes loose.
- If anything is broken, fix it.

Produced in co-operation with the Canada Safety Council – www.safety-council.org

Design: Strategic Marketing and Graphic Design
Printing: Document Publishing Centre
2005

05TR06-11434

Safe Cycling



Transportation and Public Works
Highway Safety Division