

Every year over 500,000 people are seen in emergency rooms in the United States for bicycle-related injuries.

Get a head start on bike safety.

Written by Board Certified Pediatrician

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Learning to ride a bicycle is a developmental milestone in the life of a child. The bike, a child's first vehicle, is a source of pride and a symbol of independence and freedom. Unfortunately, it can also be a source of a serious injury, or even death. Every year over 500,000 people are seen in emergency rooms in the United States for

bicycle-related injuries. Approximately one-third of these injuries are head related. There are nearly 1,000 deaths every year in the United States from bicycle-related traumatic head injuries and 60% of these are children. While you personally may have been lucky enough to avoid a serious bicycle-related injury, you shouldn't count on luck to protect your child.

There are many myths related to bicycle safety. Let's review them one at a time:

Myth #1:

"My child doesn't need to wear a helmet on short rides around the neighborhood."

FACT: Children need to wear a helmet on every bike ride no matter how short or how close to home. Most accidents happen in driveways, on sidewalks, or on bike paths not far from the child's home.

Your job is to make it a habit that the helmet goes on before their body is on the bike.

Myth #2:

"Even if my child wears a bike helmet, it won't prevent a serious head injury."

FACT: If a child wears the helmet correctly, the vast majority of head injuries are preventable.

Myth #3:

"My child hasn't been wearing a helmet and it will be impossible to get them to wear one now."

FACT: Children are capable of understanding the facts about protecting their heads, in the same way they can understand they should brush their teeth. Create a fun outing to go pick out



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a helmet so they can choose the design and tell you if it's comfortable.

As a parent, we need to establish the helmet habit early. Our children should wear helmets as soon as they start riding tricycles and if they are passengers on the back of an adult bike. If children learn to wear helmets early, they are more likely to continue the helmet habit for a lifetime – and teach your future grandchildren to wear helmets!

As parents, we should wear our bike helmets. Children learn best by observing their parents. Whenever we ride our bike we should put on our helmet. Planned bike rides involving the family wearing their helmets can also reinforce this message. The single most important factor influencing children to wear

helmets is riding with an adult who wears a helmet.

We should talk to our children and tell them why it is important to wear their helmets. We should tell them that bikes are vehicles and not toys. We should tell them that we love and value their intelligence, and need to protect them. Kids can be told that they can permanently hurt their brains or even die from head injuries. In addition, we can reinforce that many professional athletes use helmets to protect their heads.

Riding a bike for children is fun, and it can be even safer if we make them wear their helmet. Remember, more than 600 children die annually from bike-related injuries – with other children experiencing serious head injury. Helmet use should be non-negotiable and not depend on where or how far the child rides. The rule should be clear: No helmet. No bike.

Teach your children these basic safety rules:

1. Always wear a helmet when riding a bike. Make sure the bike helmet fits properly, and meets consumer products and safety commission standards. Make sure you've put it on correctly.
2. Ride on the right side of the road with traffic.
3. Use appropriate hand signals.
4. Respect traffic signals.

Basic safety measures like these can keep bike riding enjoyable and safe for your child.

For more information or to schedule an appointment please call 605-665-5538.