

Bike Safety

It's a beautiful day — what could be more perfect than a bike ride? But wait! Before you pull your bike out of the garage, let's find out how to stay safe on two wheels.

Why Is Bike Safety So Important?

Bike riding is a lot of fun, but accidents happen. The safest way to use your bike is to get places, not to play. Every year, lots of kids need to see their doctor or go to the emergency room because of bike injuries.

Why Should Kids Wear a Bike Helmet?

Wearing a helmet that fits well every time you're on a bike helps protect your face, head, and brain if you fall down. That's why it's so important to wear your bike helmet whenever you are on a bike.

Bike helmets are so important that the U.S. government has created safety rules for them. Your helmet should have a sticker that says it meets the rules set by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). If your helmet doesn't have a CPSC sticker, ask your mom or dad to get you one that does.

Wear a bike helmet **every time** you ride, even if you're going for a short ride. And follow these rules:

- Make sure your bike helmet fits you well.
- Always wear your helmet the right way so it will protect you: Make sure it covers your forehead and don't let it tip back. Always fasten the straps.
- Don't wear a hat under your helmet.
- Take care of your helmet and don't throw it around. If it's damaged, it won't protect you as well when you need it.
- Get a new helmet if you fall while you're on your bike and hit your head.
- Put reflective stickers on your helmet so drivers can see you better.

What's the Right Bike for Me?

Riding a bike that is the right size for you helps to keep you safe.

To check the size:

- When you are on your bicycle, stand straddling the top bar of your bike so that both feet are flat on the ground.
- There should be 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.6 centimeters) of space between you and the top bar.

Making a safety checklist is important. Ask your mom or dad for help:

- Make sure your seat, handlebars, and wheels fit tightly.
- Check and oil your chain regularly.
- Check your brakes to be sure they work well and aren't sticking.
- Check your tires to make sure they have enough air and the right amount of tire pressure.

What Should I Wear When I Ride My Bike?

Wearing bright clothes and putting reflectors on your bike also can help you stay safe. It helps other people on the road see you. And if they see you, that means they're less likely to run into you.

You'll also want to make sure that nothing will get caught in your bike chain, such as loose pant legs, backpack straps, or shoelaces.

Wear the right shoes — sneakers — when you bike. Sandals, flip-flops, shoes with heels, and cleats won't help you grip the pedals. And never go riding barefoot!

Riding gloves may help you grip the handlebars — and make you look like a professional!

Don't wear headphones because the music can distract you from noises around you, such as a car blowing its horn so you can get out of the way.

Where Is it Safe to Ride My Bike?

You need to check with your mom and dad about:

- where you're allowed to ride your bike
- how far you're allowed to go
- whether you should ride on the sidewalk or in the street. Kids younger than 10 years should ride on the sidewalk and avoid the street.
- common things that can get in the way like rocks, children or pets, big puddles

No matter where you ride, daytime riding is the safest. So try to avoid riding your bike at dusk and later.

And always keep an eye out for cars and trucks. Even if you're just riding on the sidewalk, a car may pull out of its driveway into the path of your bike. If you're crossing a busy road, walk your bike across the street.

What Road Rules Should I Know?

If you're allowed to ride on the street, follow these road rules:

- 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. Never ride against traffic.
- Use bike lanes wherever you can.
- Don't ride too close to parked cars. Doors can open suddenly.
- Stop at all stop signs and obey traffic (red) lights just as cars do.
- Ride single-file on the street with friends.
- When passing other bikers or people on the street, always pass to their left side, and call out "On your left!" so they know that you are coming.

How Do I Signal My Turns?

Hand signals are like turn signals and brake lights for bikers. It helps cars and trucks know what you will do next so they don't run into you. Don't change directions or lanes without first looking behind you, and always use the correct signals.

Use your left arm for all signals:

- **Left turn:** After checking behind you, hold your arm straight out to the left and ride forward slowly.
- **Stop:** After checking behind you, bend your elbow, pointing your arm downward in an upside down "L" shape and come to a stop.
- **Right turn:** After checking behind you, bend your elbow, holding your arm up in an "L" shape, and ride forward slowly. (Or, hold your right arm straight out from your side.)

Now that you've learned those hand signals, you get a big thumbs-up for finding out more about bike safety!