



Information for You from Your Health Care Team

Bike Helmets – It’s not just a safety issue, it’s the law

Helmets are required by law to be worn by all children ages 17 and younger while riding bicycles and in-line skating. Recently Onondaga County has amended this law to include helmets for skateboarding and riding scooters. In summer these outdoor activities become more prevalent and the use of helmets becomes more important. It is an issue of child safety. More than 375,000 individuals 21 and under who were treated in U. S. Emergency Departments in 1996 were treated for bicycle related injuries.

Bike helmets help prevent injuries and save lives. Research has shown that the risk of serious head injury is decreased by more than two thirds by just wearing a helmet. A well-fitted helmet can absorb more of the impact from a fall and therefore protect the head and brain from serious injury. Unfortunately, only 50% of bike riders own a helmet and only about 25% of children age 5-14 years wear a helmet when riding.

If your child feels that a helmet is uncomfortable or uncool to wear, here are some ways to encourage compliance:

- Start early. As soon as young children get a scooter or bike, give them a helmet to wear. Then it becomes a natural association: riding means wearing a helmet, even if it is in the house.
- Set the rules and set the limits. No helmet means no riding.
- Let your child decorate the helmet with stickers.
- Set a good example and always wear a helmet when you ride.

In addition, the American Academy of Pediatrics offers these recommendations regarding bicycle helmets and safety.

- All cyclists or riding passengers should wear properly fitted helmets approved by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission.
- No Exceptions – helmet usage every time the child engages in riding regardless of where, when, or how long.
- Ride bikes that are the appropriate size. The child’s feet should easily touch the ground, and the hands should easily reach the handlebars while sitting on the seat.
- Teach children to obey all traffic lights and signs, ride on the right side of the road with the traffic, and in single file if riding with others.
- Use appropriate hand signals when turning.
- Never ride at dusk or after dark.

If you have a problem buying or upsizing a helmet, the Bicycle Safety Coalition, a project of THINK FIRST of CNY, provides low cost helmets. Contact the Onondaga County Health Department’s Traffic Safety Program at 435-3280.

For those who do not obey the law and choose to risk the safety of a child, there is a civil penalty of a \$50 fine in Onondaga County. So - strap on those helmets and enjoy the ride! Have a healthy and safe summer.

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