

# What you need to know

## Does my child really need one?

The simple answer is YES. About 700 people are killed in bicycle-related crashes each year. Of those fatalities, 70 percent involve head injuries, and yet only about 20 percent to 25 percent of bicyclists wear helmets. A helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by up to 85 percent. Your child can suffer from a brain injury that may last a lifetime. Common long-term effects include concentration difficulties, aggressiveness, headaches and balance problems. Imagine your anguish if this happens to your child.

## Will my child actually use it?

Yes, if other children wear one, their parents use one, the teacher at school has told them how much good helmets do, and the child has picked out the one they really want. No, if the helmet makes your child feel like a geek, nobody else uses one and it does not fit well. Perhaps yes if you have the will to enforce the rule. Seventh grade seems to be the most resisting age for helmets, when the feeling of invincibility is strong and the rage for fashion is undeniable. The key motivator for kids is fashion, not safety. Try to make use of that.



## Does a toddler need a helmet?

Every child needs head protection when riding, but because a toddler's neck may not be strong enough to support the weight of a helmet, do not ride with a child younger than 1. If in doubt, take your child and the helmet to a pediatrician for advice. Child helmets need ventilation in hot weather, since the foam holds heat in. Toddler heads vary in shape, so pay careful attention to fit. The helmet should sit level on the child's head and fit securely with the strap fastened.

## Where can I get a helmet?

Helmets meeting the safety standards are available at bicycle shops, some department and toy stores, or by mail order from \$20 and up, or in discount stores for \$10 or even less. A good shop helps with fitting, and fit is important for safety. A discount helmet can be equally protective if you take the time to fit it carefully on your child.

## Which one should I buy?

Choose a helmet with a brightly colored, smooth shell. Check for a pinch-proof buckle. Put it on your child, adjust the straps and pads or the inner one-size-fits-all ring, and then make sure it will not come off. The most important things to look for in a helmet are a certification sticker and a good fit.

## How should a helmet fit?

A helmet should be worn squarely on top of the head, covering the top of the forehead with two-fingers distance between the eyebrow and helmet. If it is tipped back, it will not protect the forehead. The helmet fits well if it doesn't move around on the head or slide down over the wearer's eyes when pushed or pulled. The chin strap should be adjusted to fit snugly, and the straps should be placed in front and in back of the ear.



## Do I buy a new one every year?

No, a child's helmet should fit for at least several years. Heads grow less than legs and feet. Many child helmets come with two or three sets of foam fitting pads. You can start with thick pads and use the thinner pads as your child's head grows. The fitting pads do not affect the impact protection of the helmet provided by the firmer crushable polystyrene foam (picnic cooler foam).

## When should a helmet be replaced?

Replace any helmet when your child

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crashes in it. Impact crushes some of the foam. The helmet is less protective, although the damage may not be readily visible. Helmets soften impact, so the child may not even be aware that his or her head hit until you examine the helmet for damage. Replace the buckle if it cracks or if any piece of it breaks off. Nobody prompts you to replace your child's helmet, so give it some thought.

### **Can other kinds of helmets be used (football, motorcycle)?**

No. Each type of helmet is designed for protection in specific conditions and may not protect in bike crashes or falls. It is not advisable to wear the incorrect type of helmet for any of these uses. Bike helmets are very protective in head-first falls at fairly high speed. Plus, they are light and well ventilated for comfort and acceptability.



**Can bike helmets be used for other sports?**

Helmets for sale in the U.S. must meet the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standard and state that on a sticker inside. That sticker will either refer to CPSC or ASTM standards. The standards for biking and inline skating are identical, so a bike helmet is fine for normal inline skating. There is no standard for tricycle or scooter helmets, but bicycle helmets should work well for them. Aggressive extreme trick skating and skateboard helmets have a different ASTM standard for multiple hits but less severe impacts. Most bike helmets are not made for that. Helmets for equestrian sports have a unique design to resist a hoof. For a list of which helmet for which activity, please refer to the CPSC website: [www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/349.pdf](http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/349.pdf)

\*Remember that fit is not tested by the standards, so you have to try the helmet on your child's head and adjust for proper fit.\*

### **Warning: No helmets on playgrounds!**

In 1999, the first U.S. death involving a bike helmet catching on playground equipment occurred. There have been other near misses. **Be sure to teach your children to remove their helmets before using playground equipment or climbing trees!**

# **Bicycle Helmet for My Child**

## **Answers to Many Frequently Asked Questions**



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