



Bottom line: bike helmets save lives

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The number one killer of kids is unintentional injury. With more than 70 percent of children between five and 14-years-old riding bicycles, the bicycle is associated with more childhood injuries than any other consumer product except the automobile. Skateboards and in-line skates are also rapidly rising causes of head injury.

Head injuries account for more than 60 percent of bike-related deaths and even more hospitalizations. When the statistics are so glaring, why is it only 15 to 25 percent of kids wear a bike helmet?

It is estimated that 75 percent of bike-related fatalities could be avoided if kids just wore their helmets. Of course, the older the child, the less likely they are to wear a helmet. Why? Because kids get the message it's not cool to wear a helmet as you get older. Mom and dad often don't wear one. Maybe they see older neighbor kids risking it without a helmet. Kids need role models and they need rules.

First off, it should be a family rule that no one rides without a helmet – ever. Parents need to set the standard and be the role model. It's easy to convince younger kids that helmets are cool. If they're not so enthused, let them jazz their helmet up with stickers or by personalizing them with markers. And don't forget to reward them for good behavior.

When purchasing a helmet, remember the four S's.

Size: Try on all helmets before purchasing and make sure fit is snug but comfortable.

Strap: Make sure chin strap fits snugly and the "V" in the straps meets under the ear. Adjusting for best fit takes about 15 minutes.

Straight: Wear a helmet low on the forehead, about two finger widths above the eyebrows. It's imperative that the frontal lobe of the brain be protected so keep the forehead covered.

Sticker: Look for a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission sticker, or independent certification by Snell or the Safety Equipment Institute.

Even though helmets are a must, here are some other tips to keep your kids from becoming a bicycle injury statistic...

- Ride with your children whenever you can and make sure they know bicycle safety rules. Over 80 percent of bike-related deaths stem from poor decisions by the rider themselves.
- Make sure the bike is properly sized. Impact with handlebars accounts for 22 percent of bike accidents, even in low speed crashes. Severe musculoskeletal injuries are likely.
- Teach kids to ride on sidewalks or away from roads. The vast majority of bicycle-related deaths are from colliding with cars and 60 percent of those accidents are on minor roads less than one mile from the child's home.
- Restrict bicycle use as dusk, dawn or after dark when cars cannot see bicyclists. Use of reflective tape helps, but should not be relied upon to keep your child safe.

And if you don't have a bicycle helmet or cannot afford one, contact the Lincoln County Sheriff's Department.