

## Young bicyclists should never leave home without their helmets *Los Angeles Times*

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Young bicyclists can prevent accidents by following a few simple rules, a transportation group says. And they should never leave home without their helmets.

By SHARI ROAN, TIMES HEALTH WRITER

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Recent bicycle and skateboard accidents in Los Angeles County all involved children making similar, common mistakes:

Two children under 10 were killed and one seriously injured on their bikes while entering the street at an unsafe point. Another child was killed on his skateboard, also crossing at a bad spot.

And none were wearing helmets.

About half a million bicycle-related injuries are seen in U.S. emergency rooms annually, says Pat Hines, founder of Van Nuys-based Safe Moves, a nonprofit program that provides transportation safety information to the public.

Each year, 1,200 cyclists are killed in accidents; half of the victims are younger than 17.

"The reason we're seeing so many deaths from head injuries is because when parents rode their own bikes when they were kids, they were considered toys. Parents don't understand that they are no longer toys. They need to look at bicycles as a serious form of transportation."

According to studies, bicycle-related accidents often involve one of these mistakes:

\* **Mid-block ride-out:** This is the most frequent cause of accidents to younger riders. They usually ride into the street from a driveway without slowing or looking for traffic. Children should be taught to stop and look left-right-left for traffic before entering the road.

\* **Wrong-way riding:** Motorists are jarred by seeing a cyclist riding in the wrong direction. It's safest to go with the traffic flow.

\* **Motorist overtaking cyclist:** This happens when a driver doesn't see the cyclist. It occurs mostly at night, on rural roads and often involves drunk driving. The best advice for the cyclist is to avoid night riding, narrow roads and streets with speeds more than 35 mph. If you have to ride at night, use lights and reflectors.

\* **Bicycle left turn or sudden swerve:** The cyclist in this situation errs by turning left without checking traffic or signaling. Cyclists should look behind before changing lanes. Give a left-hand signal when moving to the left. Turn only when it's clearly safe to do so.

\* **Stop sign ride-out:** This happens when a cyclist enters an intersection controlled by a stop sign and collides with a vehicle on a street that is not controlled by a stop sign. Cyclists should obey all traffic signs. At busy intersections, get off your bike and walk across the road.

Hines also advises parents to be firm with their children about helmets, which state law mandates must be worn by kids younger than 18.

In her analysis of the Los Angeles County accidents, Hines has concluded that none of the four would have been seriously injured if they had been wearing helmets.

Purchase a helmet that has a sticker inside certifying that it meets the standards of the Snell Memorial Foundation or the American National Standards Institute. To ensure your child's cooperation, let the child help pick out the helmet.

\* For more information, contact Safe Moves: (818) 908-5431.

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