

Most bike injuries prevented by helmets

As warm weather arrives and children head out the door for a bike ride, make sure they are wearing properly fitted helmets.

Most bicycle accidents occur on residential streets, where children are least likely to be wearing a helmet, according to a 2004 study by the National Safe Kids Campaign. A fall from just 2 feet can cause a skull fracture.

Fewer than half (41%) of kids ages 5 to 14 wear helmets when participating in wheeled activities, and more than a third (35%) of children who use helmets wear them improperly, according to the National Safe Kids Campaign.

Helmets can be purchased for under \$10 in major retail stores — a small price to pay for protecting children from serious brain injuries or even death due to a fall.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children over 1 year old wear bicycle helmets, even when riding in a bicycle-mounted child seat or bicycle-towed trailer, or while on tricycles or other wheeled vehicles or toys. Children under 1 year old do not have the neck muscle strength to support a helmet.

For their own safety and to set a good example for children, adults also should wear a helmet at all times when bicycling, the Academy recommends.

The Bike Helmet Safety Institute recommends that a helmet:

- **Meets safety standards:** Helmet should meet the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission standard (check for a sticker inside).
- **Fits well:** The helmet should be comfortably touching the head all the way around, level and stable enough to resist even violent shakes or hard blows and should stay in place. It should be as low on the head as possible to maximize side coverage, and held level on the head with the chin strap comfortably snug.
- **Looks safe:** It should have a rounded, smooth exterior with no snag points and no more vents than needed.

Any helmet that has been involved in a crash or otherwise damaged should be thrown away and replaced, according to the Academy. All helmets should be replaced at least every five years or sooner if the manufacturer recommends it. The Academy discourages the purchase of used helmets because the age and condition of the helmet cannot be guaranteed.

Helmets come in a wide range of styles and sizes that are appealing to children and adolescents. For information on the 2005 model bicycle helmets, visit the Bike Helmet Safety Institute Web site: www.bhsi.org/helmet05.htm.

