

Columbus Youth Bicycle Helmet Ordinance

In order to protect the children of our city from potentially life-threatening injuries, Columbus City Council is considering the enactment of an ordinance that would require children younger than 18 years of age to wear a helmet when bicycling, skateboarding, or using a non-motorized scooter, in-line skates, or roller skates. This ordinance would apply to passengers on such devices as well. Below are the facts regarding this proposed legislation.

Q. How will the ordinance be enforced?

A. Enforcement of the ordinance will be similar to enforcement of other traffic-related violations, and will require the cooperation and support of law enforcement. In addition to warnings and citations issued by law enforcement, officers can give positive reinforcement incentives/rewards to give to children wearing a helmet.

The purpose of the ordinance is to increase bike helmet use, not penalize violators; therefore, the ordinance contains a provision that allows families to show proof of helmet ownership in lieu of paying the fine.

Q. Will a bike helmet ordinance be a burden on law enforcement?

A. No. The ordinance will not require law enforcement to issue many citations to be effective. Additionally, it will allow law enforcement to use the ordinance as a community relations tool, by providing education and interaction with local youth.

Experience in other communities that have enacted similar ordinances indicates that helmet use increases dramatically without law enforcement needing to issue many citations. We realize that law enforcement time is valuable, and this ordinance will not distract from other serious police activities.

Q. Can low-income families afford to comply with the ordinance?

A. Fortunately, helmets are relatively inexpensive. A recent survey of local chain retailers found quality bike helmets available for as little as \$10.

For families who cannot afford to purchase a helmet, there are local programs available to provide assistance. The Injury Free Coalition for Kids of Columbus at the Center for Injury Research and Policy and the Trauma Department at Nationwide Children's Hospital offer thousands of helmets free of charge to local children each year, and similar programs are available at other hospitals and health care centers throughout the city.

As an added resource for families, all fines collected from the violation of this ordinance will be deposited into a Bicycle Safety Fund. The money deposited into the fund will be used to assist low-income families in purchasing helmets.

Q. Why are bicycle helmets important?

A. Consider these facts:

- Bike crashes are one of the most common reasons why children younger than 14 years old who live in Columbus are admitted to a hospital.



(over)

- Each year, an average of 140 children ages 14 years and younger are killed while riding their bicycles, and more than 275,000 are treated in hospital emergency departments nationwide for bicycle-related injuries.
- Nearly half of children ages 14 years and younger who are hospitalized for bicycle-related injuries are diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries.
- 75% of fatal brain injuries among child bicyclists could be prevented with a helmet.
- Helmets can lower the risk of brain injury by up to 85-88%.
- The total annual cost of traffic-related bicyclist injury and death among children 14 years of age and younger is more than \$2.2 billion.

Q. Are bicycle helmet regulations effective?

A. States that have enacted state-wide helmet laws have seen dramatic increases in helmet use. In New Jersey, a study found that in the five years following the passage of a state mandatory bicycle helmet law for children, bicycle-related fatalities decreased by 60%.

Q. Don't most children already wear bicycle helmets?

A. No. It is estimated that in the United States less than 25% of children wear a protective helmet every time or nearly every time they ride a bicycle.

Q. If children are required to wear a helmet, won't they just stop riding?

A. There is no U.S. data to suggest that ridership has declined in the states and localities where bike helmet laws have been enacted. Other factors such as weather, perceived safety dangers, previous biking-related injury, and the financial inability to purchase/maintain a bike are more likely deterrents to bicycling.

Q. Shouldn't it be up to parents to enforce the wearing of bicycle helmets?

A. It is a parent's responsibility to ensure that their children wear protective helmets when riding their bicycles, but research shows that mandatory helmet ordinances are needed to increase helmet use and decrease bicycle-related injuries and deaths. The majority of Ohio parents are in favor of such measures because they help them to enforce the use of helmets, especially when their children are out of their sight.

Indeed, an Ohio poll conducted in 1995 and again in 2000 showed that more than 75% of Ohioans support a mandatory bicycle helmet law. Large majorities were in favor of such a law, regardless of demographic factors such as age, sex, race, household income or political party affiliation (10).

Q. Do other cities and towns in Ohio require children to wear bicycle helmets?

A. More than 20 other cities and towns in Ohio (including Cincinnati, Akron, and Dayton) require children to wear helmets. In addition, 21 states in the U.S. and at least 149 localities have helmet laws.

Q. Will the ordinance be used by law enforcement to profile or harass minorities or other groups?

A. Although this question has been raised, there is no evidence that this has occurred in other localities that have enacted helmet regulations. The NAACP and HUD have testified in Ohio in support of a statewide helmet law. Some studies have shown lower helmet use rates among African Americans in communities without a helmet ordinance. Therefore, an ordinance in Columbus may actually disproportionately benefit minority populations.