

Safety for children using bicycles and other small wheeled devices

Information for parents and caregivers



Common types of injuries

- To the hand, wrist and elbow as the rider puts out their hand and arm to break their fall.
- Broken teeth and cuts to the mouth, as children hit handlebars or other objects.
- Damage to the knees as the rider falls forward.

More serious injuries

- Head injuries when riders hit the ground or collide with objects.
- Abdominal injuries can also occur if an unprotected handle bar or another sharp object is thrust in to the child's abdomen as they fall.

Riding bicycles and other small wheeled devices such as skateboards, in-line skates, roller skates and micro-scooters is fun, good exercise, a great way for children to develop their balance and motor skills and become more independent. However, it is important to remember that bicycles and small wheeled devices are not toys; they are vehicles which children use, often in public spaces and on roads. Parents have a responsibility to make sure that their children are safe when they ride a bike or any of the small wheeled devices.

Each year hundreds of young children are treated in hospitals around South Australia as a result of accidents involving bicycles and small wheeled devices. Falls and collisions with other people or objects are the most common cause of injuries. For example, most cycling injuries occur on public roads, often don't involve another vehicle, but occur when children fall off their bike after crashing into a pole, gutter or fence. With small wheeled devices, most falls are the result of loss of control, mainly due to the lack of braking mechanisms.

Many people think that the country is a safer place for children to ride their bikes. Country children are just as likely to lose control of their bike or small wheeled device. Country children also have to deal with a range of different road surfaces, such as dirt, gravel, pot holes, and slippery surfaces. Also, traffic often travels at greater speeds on the open roads.

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Ways to keep your child protected

Helmets

Wearing a helmet reduces the impact of the head hitting the ground or an object, and can protect the brain if worn properly. Studies show that a helmet reduces the risk of brain injury by around 90%. They are the most important piece of safety equipment a child can wear. Parents need to make it clear to children that helmets are to be used every time, even when in the back yard.

Choosing a helmet

It is recommended that the helmet meets the Australian Standard AS/NZS 2063. This shows that the safety helmet is an approved one and can help reduce the severity of head injuries.

Step 1 – size

Measure your child's head for approximate size. Try the helmet on to ensure it fits snugly. While it is sitting flat on top of your child's head, make sure the helmet doesn't rock side to side. Sizing pads come with new helmets; use the pads to securely fit it to your child's head. Mix or match the sizing pads for the greatest comfort. Remove the padding when your child's head grows. If the helmet has a universal fit ring instead of sizing pads, adjust the ring size to fit the head.

Step 2 – position

The helmet should sit level on your child's head and low on your child's forehead – one or two finger-widths above their eyebrow.

Step 3 – buckles

Center the left buckle under the chin. On most helmets, the straps can be pulled from the back of the helmet to lengthen or shorten the chin straps. This task is easier if you take the helmet off to make these adjustments.

Step 4 – Side straps

Adjust the slider on both straps to form a 'V' shape under, and slightly in front of, the ears. Lock the slider if possible.

Step 5 – chin strap

Buckle the chin strap. Tighten the strap until it is snug, so that no more than one or two fingers fit under the strap.

Step 6 – final fitting

- Does the helmet fit right? Tell your child to open their mouth wide...big yawn! The helmet should pull down on the head. If not, refer back to step 5 and tighten the chin strap.
- Does the helmet rock back more than two fingers above the eyebrows? If so, unbuckle, shorten the front strap by moving the slider forward. Buckle, retighten the chin strap, and test again.
- Does the helmet rock forward into the eyes? If so, unbuckle, tighten the back strap by moving the slider back toward the ear. Buckle, retighten the chin strap, and test again.

When to replace a helmet?

Replace any helmet that has been involved in a crash or is damaged.

The helmet should fit now

Buy a helmet that fits your child's head now, not a helmet to 'grow into.' Replace any helmet that has been outgrown as it won't be safe.

The bike

Make sure the bike is the right size

A bike that is too big or too small is a safety hazard. Get your child to sit on the bike; their toes should touch the ground on both sides.

Do bike safety checks

1. **Brakes**
Make sure brake blocks are not worn down and are fitted properly.
2. **Chain**
Chain should be frequently oiled and fitting properly.
3. **Tyres**
Look for bald spots, bulges and cuts. Make sure they are pumped up to the proper tyre pressure.
4. **Pedals**
Pedals must spin freely.
5. **Bell or horn**
Bell or horn should be loud enough for others to hear.
6. **Lights and reflectors**
Make sure lights and reflectors meet Safety Standards (lights AS3562; reflectors AS2142). They must be secure, properly aligned, clean and in good working order.
7. **Seat**
The height of the seat should be correctly adjusted so that the rider can sit on the seat with their toes able to reach the ground.
8. **Handle bar grips**
Handle bar ends must be covered with intact grips. This reduces the risk of your child being impaled onto the handle bar ends if they fall.

The micro-scooter

There are some safety concerns with micro-scooters.

- The small wheels and low clearance make the rider more likely to lose control on an uneven surface. Scooters with larger wheels and pneumatic rubber tyres are more stable.
- The braking system is intended to work by downward pressure applying friction to the back wheel. This often does not work, especially in cheaper models.
- Folding mechanisms can sometimes fail and fold under pressure or after some wear.
- Kidsafe SA is concerned that the combination of speed, poor braking mechanisms and the balance required, make it difficult for new riders to manage.

Do scooter safety checks

1. **Brakes and locking mechanisms**
Make sure brakes are not worn down and the locking mechanism is effective.
2. **Sharp edges**
Check for sharp edges and objects.
3. **Steering column**
Make sure the steering column locks easily and does not collapse, or is too short, causing the rider to stoop.
4. **Handlebar grips**
Must be secure and not swivel, and should be intact so that the ends of the handlebar are covered.
5. **Non-slip foot-boards**

Safety is simple

- Avoid poorly made products
- Don't use damaged products
- Use protective equipment
For example: wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, or any small wheeled device. Wear wrist guards, knee and elbow guards when riding small wheeled devices such as skateboards, in-line skates, roller skates and micro-scooters. These are designed to strengthen and protect vulnerable points of the body that research has shown to be common points of contact when children fall.
- Use items that increase visibility to road users, pedestrians and vehicles
These can include bright coloured clothing, reflective tape, reflectors, flashing lights and visibility flags.
- Only ride during daylight hours
- Ensure supervised riding
Children under 10 years of age should cycle with a responsible adult. Most children under 10 years of age do not have the skills to ride safely without supervision on the roads.
- Learn the rules of the road
Make sure your child is taught the rules of the road for safe riding practices.
- Know the dangers of the driveway
Children should be taught that the driveway is dangerous. They should not be encouraged to ride their bikes in the driveway. If riding on a footpath or road they should be looking for cars turning in to, or coming out of driveways.

What the legislation is in South Australia

It is important to remember that laws are made to protect your children and should be reinforced to your children at all times. Police Officers can issue fines to riders and their parents for disobeying the road rules.

Bicycles

- A safety helmet must be worn.
- Bicycles can be ridden on the road.
- Bicycles can be ridden on the footpath if the child is under 12 years old.
- Bicycles can be ridden at night with a properly functioning white front light, red rear light, and reflectors on the rear of the bike.

Micro-scooters, skateboards, roller skates and roller blades

- A safety helmet must be worn.
- Can be ridden on the road, on the proviso that there is no dividing strip, and no painted centre white line.
- Can be ridden on the footpath.
- Cannot be ridden at night.

Where else can I skate?

There are several ways that you can find out about where the good skate parks are and learn a bit about their features.

- Contact your local council and ask them about skate parks in your area.
- Look up this website. It is sponsored by the City of Norwood, Payneham and St Peters and allows you to search any suburb or town in South Australia (and Australia) to see where skate parks are located, as well as giving a description of their features.

www.npsp.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=942

For more information, contact:

Kidsafe SA Inc.
Women's and Children's Hospital
72 King William Rd,
North Adelaide SA 5006
Phone: (08) 8161 6318
Email: sa@kidsafe.org.au
Website: www.kidsafesa.com.au

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