

# **Wearing Bicycle Helmets**

Each year, bicycle-related deaths number about 900, and hospital emergency rooms treat more than 500,000 people for bicycle-related injuries. More children, ages 5 to 14, go to hospital emergency rooms for such injuries than for any other sport. Many of these injuries involve the head. If you don't wear a helmet, you're risking your life.

Statistics show that five Sailors died and 68 more were injured in recreational bicycle mishaps reported during the last five years. Fifteen of the 68 people who went to medical facilities for treatment had been involved in mishaps where their heads hit the ground.

## **Why Wear a Bicycle Helmet?**

- Wearing one has been shown to reduce serious head injuries by 85 percent.
- 39 percent of deaths from cycling injuries occur in children under the age of 15.
- Even a low-speed fall on a bicycle path can cause a serious head injury.
- You're breaking the law if you don't wear an approved bicycle helmet while riding a bike on any DoD installation (applies worldwide). This rule affects everyone but those workers operating bicycles in areas that require the use of ANSI-approved helmets (hard hats) for protection from falling and flying objects. They are allowed to wear their hard hats instead of approved bicycle helmets. There is no federal law in the United States requiring bicycle helmets, but some states and localities started adopting laws in 1987. To date, 20 states (including the District of Columbia) and more than 125 localities have laws. Only 17 states have no state or local helmet laws at all.

## **How To Buy the Right Helmet**

Choose one designed specifically for cycling (not hockey, skiing, football, or some other sport). Make sure the helmet has a certification label from one of these organizations: Snell Memorial Foundation, American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM), American National Standards Institute (ANSI), or the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). A certification label indicates the helmet has been tested to withstand certain levels of impact, giving you the best protection available. Here are other features to check for:

- Helmets should have adequate vents to allow for airflow to the head.
- Avoid helmets with extremely pointed shapes, inadequate or excessive vents, dark colors, thin straps, and complicated adjustments.
- Make sure your helmet fits.

- When you place your helmet on your head, it should sit low—the brim should be about the width of two fingers above the eyebrows.
- The helmet should not be tilted forward or backward.
- The chinstraps should go over both ears in a V-shape, with the ears in the middle of the V. According to the CPSC, the chinstraps should be secure around the chin, so the helmet doesn't move up and down or from side to side.

*[Since March 1999, all bicycle helmets made in or imported to the United States have had to meet a uniform safety standard issued by the CPSC. Among other things, this requirement means that bike helmets for children ages 1 to 5 must cover more of their heads, giving them more protection. Always look for a label or sticker that says the helmet meets the CPSC standard.—Ed.]*

## Helmet Sizes

To find an approximate helmet size, measure around the head, just above the eyebrows. Use this chart (recommended by most manufacturers) to help you decide what size to buy:

Head Circumference	Helmet Size	Nominal
20 1/2 inches	6 1/2	Toddler
20 3/4 inches	6 5/8	Small
21 1/4 inches	6 3/4	Medium
21 5/8 inches	6 7/8	Medium
22 inches	7	Medium
22 3/8 inches	7 1/8	Medium
22 3/4 inches	7 1/4	Large

### If Your Helmet Is Too Small...

- Loosen the chinstraps.
- Remove any extra foam from inside.
- If the helmet still is too small, you will need to buy a larger one.

### If Your Helmet Is Too Big...

- Tighten the chinstraps.
- Add extra foam to the inside (most helmets come with extra foam).
- If the helmet still is too big, you will need to buy a smaller one.

When sizing a helmet, never alter the outer shell because you may damage the helmet and make it less effective in protecting you from a head injury.

### **Replacing Your Helmet**

- Always replace your helmet after a crash, even if you can't see any damage. The inner lining may have been destroyed.
- Cracks or dents mean that you need a new helmet.
- When a helmet is five years old, replace it because the material naturally weakens over time.

### **Caring For Your Helmet**

- Wash in warm water with a mild soap.
- Only use paint and stickers that come with a helmet when you buy it; other paint and glue might damage the helmet.
- Keep your helmet away from heat. Even if it's stored in a car trunk, a helmet can come unglued, thus rendering it ineffective protection against injury.
- Check the screws and straps to make sure they are tight and work correctly.

### **Resources**

- [www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/recreation/safetybriefs/bicyclingbrief.htm](http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/ashore/recreation/safetybriefs/bicyclingbrief.htm)
- [www.safetycenter.navy.mil/photo/archive/photo105p.htm](http://www.safetycenter.navy.mil/photo/archive/photo105p.htm)
- [www.bhsi.org/mil\\_regs.htm](http://www.bhsi.org/mil_regs.htm)
- [www.bhsi.org/navy.htm](http://www.bhsi.org/navy.htm)
- [www.bhsi.org/mandator.htm](http://www.bhsi.org/mandator.htm)
- [www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/useyourhead/page2.html](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/useyourhead/page2.html)