Bicycle Laws and Safety Guidelines
Courtesy of New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency

A BICYCLE IS NOT A TOY. IT IS A VEHICLE!

- Males are five times more likely to be killed as bicyclists than females. More than half of all bicyclist deaths occur to school age youth (ages 5-17).
- Most bicyclist deaths result from bicycle-motor vehicle collisions. But injuries can happen anywhere - in parks, bike paths, and driveways - and often do not involve motor vehicles.
- Head injuries are the most serious injury type and are the most common cause of deaths among bicyclists. The most severe injuries are those to the brain that cause permanent damage.
- Studies have proven that bicycle helmet use can significantly reduce head injuries.

HOW CAN YOU HELP STOP THESE TRAGEDIES?

- Buy your child an approved bike helmet. Purchase one that has a sticker inside certifying the helmet meets standards of the Snell Memorial Foundation and/or the American National Standards Institute (ANSIZ90.4).
- Let your child help pick out the helmet because it must be worn every time he/she rides. If you're a rider, buy one for yourself, too, and set a good example by wearing it.
- Also encourage your child's friends to wear helmets.
- Make certain your child's bike is the correct size, is safely maintained, and has reflectors.
- Children under age 9 should not ride their bikes in the street. They are not able to identify and adjust to the many dangerous traffic situations.
- Teach your child to always stop and look left-right-left before entering the road. This is a good pedestrian safety practice, too, for crossing the street.
- If a bicyclist rides in the road, the cyclist must obey traffic laws that apply to motor vehicle operators.
- Instruct your child on the bicycle rules of the road. Driver licensing agencies and highway departments are good sources for booklets that explain bicycle safety rules.
- Enroll your child in a bike safety education program if one is available in your community.
- Never allow your child to ride at night or with audio headphones. Stress the need to remain alert since most drivers do not see riders. Bicyclists should ride single file on the right side of the road and signal their intentions to turn to other road users.

TRAFFIC LAWS APPLY TO BICYCLES

Every person riding a bicycle has the same rights and privileges of persons driving cars. The bicycle driver also has the same responsibilities as other drivers. Every person riding a bicycle normally has all of the rights and is subject to the duties which apply to the driver of any other vehicle under the rules of the road.

RESPECTING THE LAWS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- You can be a welcome bicycle rider in your community if you are aware of the regulations and you follow them.
- Check on the local ordinances that apply to bicycles before you begin riding in a new community.
- Remember, you do come under the jurisdiction of law enforcement officials.
- Any city or town shall have the power to make ordinances, bylaws or regulations respecting the use and equipment of bicycles.
- Any bicyclist shall stop upon demand of a peace officer and permit his bicycle to be inspected.

DRIVE SINGLE FILE

- Two riders are safest when riding single file on the right side of the road.
- Never block traffic by riding two abreast.
- Persons riding bicycles two or more abreast shall not impede the normal and reasonable flow of traffic and on a laned road shall ride within a single lane.

WHY WEAR A HELMET?

- A crash can happen to even the most careful person. On any ride you might catch a wheel in a crack in the road surface, skid on gravel, hit a wide pothole or drain gate or collide with a pedestrian, a dog or another vehicle.
- Nobody expects to have a crash, but **it is essential to have head protection** in case you are involved in one.
- Road rash and broken bones are painful, but they do heal. Head injuries, however, can cause permanent damage.

KEEP YOUR BICYCLE SAFE

- Do not wait until you are driving to find out that your brakes do not work or that your chain is weak. Do a bicycle safety check before you ride.
- NO bicycle should be operated unless the steering, brakes, tires and other required equipment are in safe condition.

BRAKES

- In order to ride safely you must be able to stop your bicycle when you want to.
- Maintain your brakes in good condition and check them before each ride.
- Every bicycle should be equipped with a brake or brakes which will enable its driver to stop the bicycle within 25 feet from a speed of 10 miles per hour on dry, level, clean pavement.

DO NOT CARRY PASSENGERS

- Two on a bicycle built for one is double trouble!
- No bicycle shall be used to carry more persons at one time than the number for which it is designed and equipped.

LIGHTS FOR NIGHT DRIVING

- You must see and be seen to be safe on a bicycle. Most nighttime bicycle accidents are caused by bikes not being seen by other vehicles.
- Bicycle lamps and reflectors are basic safety equipment. Every bicycle operated during darkness should be equipped with a lamp emitting a white light visible from a distance of 300 feet in front of the bicycle, and with a red reflector on the rear visible to a distance of 300 feet. A lamp emitting a red light visible from 300 feet may be used in addition to the red reflector.

REFLECTORS

- Reflectors will increase your ability to be seen.
- Spoke reflectors, pedal reflectors, front and rear reflectors, as well as reflectorized tire walls, reflective tape on your bicycle frame, and reflectorized clothing all will help you enjoy safe night riding.
- All bicycles should be equipped with a reflector on each pedal visible from a distance of 200 feet from the front or rear of the bicycle, and with a red rear reflector visible at 300 feet during darkness.

HANDLEBARS AND SEAT

- Be sure your bicycle fits the rider.
- Keep handlebars and seat adjusted tightly and correctly. Handlebars should be the same height as the seat and tightened.
- Always ride upon or astride a permanent and regular seat attached to the bicycle.
- No person should operate on the roadway any bicycle equipped with handlebars so raised that the operator must elevate his hands above the level of his shoulders to grasp the normal steering grip area.

DO NOT CARRY BULKY PACKAGES OR BUNDLES

- Too large a package in front of you will obscure your vision.
- Carrying a large or heavy package may cause you to lose your balance or to swerve and fall.

- No person should carry a package, bundle or article which prevents the driver from keeping at least one hand upon the handlebars.

DO NOT CLING TO OTHER VEHICLES

- Clinging to a moving vehicle is extremely dangerous. The driver of the tow vehicle and other vehicles are unaware of your presence and may endanger your life.
- The tow speed and your lack of visibility increase your chances of losing control of your bicycle.
- No person riding a bicycle should hold on to, or hitch on to, any other vehicle moving upon a road way.

FIVE COMMON BICYCLE AND MOTOR VEHICLE CRASHES

MID-BLOCK RIDEOUT

- This is the most frequent crash type for young riders and occurs soon after the bicyclist enters the road from a driveway, alley or curb without slowing, stopping or looking for traffic. The bicyclist's sudden entry leaves the motorist too little time to avoid the collision.
- "Bicyclist" - Stop and look left-right-left for traffic before entering the road.

WRONG WAY RIDING

- Motorists do not expect traffic to be approaching from the wrong way. It is the exception to the rule that creates the condition for a crash, which is the main reason why it is unlawful to ride facing traffic.
- "Bicyclist" - Go with the flow! Ride Right - with traffic just like cars do.

MOTORIST OVERTAKING CYCLIST

- This crash occurs because the motorist fails to see and react to the bicyclist until it is too late. This crash type is more frequent at night, on narrow rural roads, involves driver inattention and also involves drunk driving.
- "Bicyclist" - Avoid riding at night, on narrow roads and where highway speeds are over 35 mph. Always use lights and reflectors if you must ride at night.

BICYCLIST LEFT TURN OR SUDDEN SWERVE

- The bicyclist swerves to the left without checking traffic and without signaling, and moves into the path of an overtaking motor vehicle. The motorist does not have enough time to avoid the collision.
- "Bicyclist" - Be predictable. Always ride in a straight line. When preparing to change your lane position, look behind you and yield to on-coming traffic. For making a left turn, give the left hand signal and when it is safe, move to the left lane. Give the left-hand signal again, and then make your turn when it is safe to do so.

STOP SIGN RIDE-OUT

- This crash occurs when the bicyclist enters an intersection that is controlled by a sign and collides with a motor vehicle approaching from an uncontrolled lane. The bicyclist fails to stop/slow and look for traffic before entering the intersection. This improper action leaves the motorist too little time to avoid a collision.
- "Bicyclist" - When driving your vehicle, obey all traffic signs and signals. At busy intersections, get off your bike and walk across the road as you do when you are a pedestrian.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Three out of four cyclists killed in crashes die of head injuries?
- The majority of all bicyclist injuries are head related?
- Over a half million Americans will be seriously injured this year in bicycle crashes?
- Your brain is extremely sensitive to any impact, even bicycling at a very low speed?
- Over 600 children will die from bicycle crashes this year, most only a few blocks from home?

REMEMBER

- **Always use hand signals.**

- **Always obey all traffic laws.**
- **Always wear helmets**

This information is courtesy of the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency. **The laws may be different in your state. Be sure to know what they are and respect them.**

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