Bicycling, Ages 9-12

At what age is it safe for children to begin to bicycle beyond quiet neighborhood streets, and ride on the street instead of the sidewalk?

Experts differ slightly on this issue. There is no “magic age” that sets when it is safe to ride on the street. But children in the 9-12 year-old age group likely have developed the learning and understanding skills that allow them to bicycle on the road.
“Younger kids (under the age of 9 or 10) generally do not judge closing speeds well,” explains Preston Tyree, education director of the Texas Bicycle Coalition in Austin.

- Children who are first learning to bicycle, no matter how old they are, should cycle with an adult until they attain the confidence and skills to ride on their own.
- Good route selection should always be emphasized. Using bike lanes, bike routes, and streets with less traffic is recommended.
- Even when cycling on the street or block where they live, the 9-12 year old cyclist must exercise the same amount of caution and defensive cycling that they do on larger roads.
- When teaching 9-12 year-old cyclists, focus on both what they <u>need</u> to know and also what they <u>want</u> to know about cycling. Spark their interest by asking what they would like to know about cycling. Teach them to seek out cycling knowledge by:
  - Searching the Web.
  - Visiting the library.
  - Asking at a bike shop or community recreation center about cycling clubs and rides in their area.
- Stress that it's important to ride with traffic. In fact, it's illegal to ride against it.
- Teach the 9-12 year-old cyclist to practice advanced riding skills, such as:
  - Selecting gears.
  - Learning how to ride in groups.
  - How to follow another cyclist at a safe distance.
- Teach 9-12's about lane positioning:
  - How to look behind you before changing your position or lane.
  - How to deal with right turn lanes when cycling straight.
  - What to do when the lane is narrow and cars are parked in your way.
  - How to alert others in traffic to your intended moves.
- Teach this age group more about their bicycle and its accessories. Emphasize the importance of getting to know your bike. Teach how glasses and gloves can help you. Introduce them to the option of special bicycle clothing. And explain how to maintain good hygiene even after a tough ride.
- For more information visit the League of American Bicyclists website at www.bikeleague.org.

This information is courtesy of the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency. **These are good recommendations. But the laws may be different in your state. Be sure to know what they are**.

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