

Cycling safer than driving for young people, study finds

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Researchers from UCL have found that cycling is safer than driving for young males, with 17 to 20 year old drivers facing almost five times greater risk per hour than cyclists of the same age.

The researchers looked at [hospital admissions](#) and deaths in England between 2007 and 2009 for pedestrians, [cyclists](#), and drivers. These were studied by age-group and sex. The research is published in the journal [PLOS ONE](#).

Using National Travel [Survey data](#) in England for the same time period, the team converted the distance travelled by each age-group, sex and mode of transport into time spent travelling using mean trip speeds.

"What we found is that risks were similar for men aged between 21 and 49 for all three modes of transport and for female pedestrians and drivers aged 21 and 69 years," said lead author Dr Jennifer Mindell (UCL Epidemiology & Public Health). "However, we found that for young male cyclists between 17 and 20 years of age, cycling was markedly safer than travelling by car.

"Perceived road danger is a strong disincentive to cycling and many potential cyclists do not ride on the road due to safety concerns," continued Dr Mindell. "But research regarding the safety of cycling tends to be distorted by a number of errors which are found repeatedly in published papers and policy documents, with many substantially overstating cycling injuries and under-reporting pedestrian injuries."

Those most at risk when travelling were men aged between 17 and 20 for driving, males aged over 70 for cycling and females aged over 70 for walking. In general, fatality rates were substantially higher among males than females.

The team went on to compare the UK data with figures from the Netherlands – a country widely perceived to be bike-friendly. They found a similar pattern in both countries, with teenage male cyclists less likely to suffer serious injury or [death](#) than those travelling by car.

"This research dispels the idea that risk for UK cyclists is substantially higher than for drivers or pedestrians, and hopefully will encourage more people to take up something which is not only good for health, but also the environment," said Dr Mindell.

"An individual who cycles one hour a day for 40 years would cover about 180,000km, whilst accumulating only a one in 150 chance of fatal injury. This is lower than for [pedestrians](#) who face a higher fatality rate per kilometre travelled," she added. "The health benefits of cycling are much greater than the fatality risk."

Active travel - defined as walking or [cycling](#) - is estimated to save £17bn in healthcare costs alone, according to a recent *Lancet* paper.

Provided by University College London

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