

Research supports laws that require bicyclists to wear helmets

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Bicycle helmets save lives, and their use should be required by law. That's the conclusion of a study to be presented Monday, May 6, at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Washington, DC.

"This study highlights the importance of regulations in the promotion of safe exercise," said lead author William P. Meehan III, MD, FAAP, director of the Micheli Center for Sports Injury Prevention and the Sports Concussion Clinic at Boston Children's Hospital.

About 900 people die each year in bicycle crashes, three-quarters of them from [head injuries](#). Pointing to evidence that shows helmets reduce the risk of injury and death, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all cyclists wear helmets that fit properly every time they ride. The AAP also supports legislation that requires all cyclists to wear helmets.

To determine if such laws reduce national injury and death rates, Dr. Meehan and his colleagues analyzed data from the [Fatality Analysis Reporting System](#) on all U.S. bicyclists younger than 16 years of age who were severely injured or died between January 1999 and December 2009. They compared the injury and [death rates](#) in states with mandatory [helmet laws](#) to those without.

Results showed that 2,451 children suffered incapacitating injuries or died in bicycle-[motor vehicle crashes](#) during the study period. An incapacitating injury was defined as one that prevents a person from

walking or normally continuing the activities he or she was capable of before the injury.

States with mandatory helmet laws had significantly lower rates of fatalities/incapacitating injuries after bicycle-[motor vehicle collisions](#) than states without helmet laws (2 per 1 million children vs. 2.5 per 1 million children, respectively). Helmet laws continued to be associated with lower rates of fatalities and incapacitating injuries after adjusting for factors known to be associated with lower rates of motor vehicle fatalities, including elderly driver licensure laws, legal blood alcohol limit (lower than 0.08 percent) and household income.

"In conjunction with our previous work on booster seat laws, this study further proves that mandatory safety equipment laws are effective," said Rebekah C. Mannix, MD, MPH, senior author on the study.

Currently, only 21 states and the District of Columbia have laws requiring bicyclists to wear helmets.

More information: To view the abstract, "Bicycle Helmet Laws Decrease the Rates of Fatal and Incapacitating Injuries Resulting from Bicycle-Motor Vehicle Collisions in Children," go to www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view...hp?nu=PAS13L1_3165.2

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