

# Nearly one in five parents say their child never wears a helmet while riding a bike

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National poll focuses on children's street smarts, including bike, skateboard, scooter and road safety. Credit: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at the University of Michigan

Despite evidence that helmets are critical to preventing head injuries, not all children wear them while biking, skateboarding and riding scooters, a new national poll finds.

Eighteen percent of parents say their [child](#) never wears a helmet on a bike ride, and even more say their kids skip helmets on a skateboard (58 percent) and scooter (61 percent), suggests the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health at the University of Michigan.

The risks are significant. More than 426,000 [children](#)—nearly 50 every hour—visited an [emergency department](#) in 2015 due to a wheeled sports-related injury, according to a 2017 report from the Safe Kids Worldwide and Nationwide's Make Safe Happen program.

"Helmets are vital to preventing [head injuries](#) in case a child falls or is struck by a car," says poll co-director and Mott pediatrician Gary Freed, M.D., MPH.

"It is very concerning that so many children ride bikes and other non-motorized wheeled vehicles without ever using helmets."

The nationally-representative poll was based on responses to questions about non-motorized vehicles from 1,330 parents of at least one child aged 4-13.

Results indicate a wide range in the use of safety strategies when children are playing with wheeled-toys outside. Most parents said their child gives cars the right of way (93 percent) and stops their bike at [stop signs](#) (82 percent.) However, the majority of parents also acknowledged their child does not use hand signals or walk their bike across crosswalks.

"Unfortunately, a substantial number of parents polled reported that their children do not consistently follow basic safety strategies on wheels," Freed says. "Our report suggests that families should take more precautions to ensure children are safe, including wearing helmets and

understanding safety in the streets."

Of the 4 in 5 parents polled whose child rides a bicycle, most said their child uses sidewalks (73 percent) or parks or trails (59 percent). More children also ride on streets without [bike lanes](#) (42 percent) than streets with bike lanes (11 percent).

Parents were also more likely to say that [younger children](#) always wear a helmet compared to [older children](#) but not all families enforced a strict helmet rule.

Older children (ages 11-13) are more likely to ride in a street (with or without bike lanes) compared with younger children (ages 4-10). Just wearing a helmet is not enough, Freed notes. To get the most protection, helmets should fit snugly on the head, and be used correctly.

Freed says that in areas that allow it, children should also ride non-motorized vehicles on the sidewalk. Parents should accompany younger children and teach them top safety lessons, such as slowing down, using a bell, or calling out to alert pedestrians that they are approaching. Children biking on the sidewalk should also stop at intersections and walk their bike across the crosswalk, as passing cars may not be looking for a bike to emerge from the sidewalk.

Children also need to be on the lookout for people getting in or out of parked cars, experts say. Many children are injured each year when a driver opens their car door onto the street and strikes an oncoming bicycle.

"With summer around the corner, bikes, skateboards, and scooters will be a fun way for kids to play outside and get exercise," Freed says.

"We encourage [parents](#) to talk to their children about safety rules and

expectations ahead of time to make sure these outdoor activities are both fun and safe."

Provided by University of Michigan

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