

Researchers say helmet laws effective

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(Medical Xpress) -- University of Alberta researchers have confirmed that helmet bylaws increase wearing rates among adults.

In a study published in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* April 19, U of A School of Public Health graduate student Mohammad Karkhaneh; Brian Rowe, professor in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry at the U of A and research director with the Department of Emergency Medicine; Don Voaklander, professor in the School of Public Health and director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research; Duncan Saunders, chair, Department of Public Health Sciences in the School of Public Health; and Brent Hagel, professor in the Departments of Pediatrics and Community Health Sciences at the

University of Calgary, compared the number of people wearing [helmets](#) in the province, compared in the city of St. Albert. Alberta has legislation requiring the use of helmets while cycling for children under the age of 18, while St. Albert is the only jurisdiction in the province with a bylaw extending the requirement to cyclists of all ages.

In 2006, when St. Albert's bylaw was implemented, 74 per cent of adult cyclists wore helmets. In 2010, that number grew to 80 per cent. In comparison, only 55 per cent of adults in Alberta wore helmets in 2006.

"There is strong evidence to support the role of helmet legislation in improving the rates of cycling helmet use in many communities," says Karkhaneh. "Successful implementation of helmet laws has occurred in Australia and in other parts of Canada. We're pleased to see proof of this right here in Alberta."

One of the main challenges with discussing universal bicycle helmet legislation in Alberta is the prevalence of myths and the lack of knowledge, say the researchers.

"Some people feel that bicycle helmet legislation is too difficult to enforce and that without enforcement, it's ineffective. The Australia experience is interesting because universal helmet legislation was introduced for all ages and immediately demonstrated an increase in the use of helmets without strong enforcement," says Rowe. "The rate of bicyclist deaths and head or face injuries has decreased in many parts of the world following the introduction of bicycle helmet laws."

Even more disturbing is the belief that bicycle helmets do not reduce severe injuries, says Rowe.

"There is very strong evidence that the risk of head injuries related to bicycle crashes is directly related to the use of a Canadian Standards

Association-approved cycling helmet,” he says. “The proper use of a helmet reduces the risk of cycling injuries to the head, face and brain by up to 88 per cent.”

"We are proud to be the first and only community in Alberta that took further action on this serious issue. Health and safety remains a priority to council today,” says St. Albert Mayor Nolan Crouse. “We are delighted that this study reinforces the efficacy of having mandated helmet use, with the result being fewer severe head injuries. While children are our future, we also need to protect their parents and other adults in the community. I encourage other governments step up to broaden the use of bicycle helmet through legislation.”

"St. Albert's experience serves as a model for the entire province of Alberta," says Voaklander; "the city should be commended for their leadership and innovation. In the absence of provincial legislation, the council took the initiative to protect their community."

Provided by University of Alberta

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