

Tips for Cyclists

Tips for safe cycling on the roads apply just as much to adults as to children.

- ***Checking bike, helmet, clothing and the conditions before getting on the bike** – every time;
- ***Always shoulder checking before altering position on the road** – including starting, stopping, turning either way and going round potholes, shores, cars or other obstacles;
- ***Signalling to communicate with other road users;**
- ***Travelling at a speed where the cyclist is in control of the bike and surroundings**, and travelling with two hands on the handlebars except when signalling;
- ***Knowing what is happening all around, all the time – observation;**
- ***Knowing when to stop and wait for a safe break in the traffic**, and knowing when to pull in and get off and walk with the bike if not completely confident;
- ***Knowing how to stop the bicycle safely in an emergency;**
- ***Recognising and obeying road signs, traffic lights and road markings;**

In order for these skills to be honed, they need to be practised and repeated so that they become second nature. In addition, safe cyclists who fully incorporate these points go on to be safer, more considerate drivers too.

What do you know about bike safety?

Try answering the following questions!

Q. What should you check before getting on the bike to cycle?

A. Check the bike is working properly, check helmet is properly adjusted and in correct position, check saddle height is right and check clothing – is there anything loose which might get caught in the bike parts such as shoe laces or jacket toggles or a bag strap. What are the conditions – weather and road surface – and how will they affect cycling?

Q. What is the first thing to do before moving position (starting, stopping, turning, going round a car or pothole etc.) on a bike when out cycling?

A. Look over your shoulder – knowing what is going on all around is a large part of staying safe.

Q. What is the last thing to do before turning right and why do it?

A. Give a lifesaver look over the right shoulder to warn of anyone who might be overtaking from behind.

Q. What is the best way to avoid being hit by the door of a parked car opening?

A. Stay out wide enough so that if it does open it won't hit you, while making sure there is still enough room to get by safely in this position – if a car is coming in the opposite direction and there isn't room stop and wait in position.

Q. Where should you cycle on the road?

A. About 2ft away from the path. Any nearer and there's a risk of going into potholes, shores or gravel, and of encouraging people to overtake where there really isn't room to do so and where there is no room to take avoiding action.

Q. How will weather affect cycling?

A. A cyclist needs to take account of all conditions, including weather and material on the roads, such as gravel or fallen leaves. Cycle slower and be especially careful to sit tall in corners and stops when conditions are bad.

Cycling with Children

You can help a child to be a safe cyclist by going out cycling with him/her and by emphasising the following points:

1. Encourage your child to wear a helmet, and lead by example – wear one yourself! Remember, a helmet is like an insurance policy, you wear it hoping you will never actually need to avail of its protective properties;
2. Encourage a child to wear bright comfortable clothing to enhance visibility and ease of cycling. Make sure to check for open laces or anything which might get caught in the bike before setting off;
3. Make sure to check bikes before setting off, checking both brakes are in working order – with only a front brake, there is a real risk of flying over the handle bars when stopping; with only a back brake it is not possible to stop suddenly (in an emergency) as the bike will come to a gradual stop;
4. Start from a quiet place with little traffic and plenty of vision in both directions;
5. Encourage a child to cycle 2 to 3 feet away from the path (many children cycle too close to the path). This will discourage motorists from overtaking where there really isn't room to do so, and if a car should come too close, the cyclist has room to manoeuvre. If the rider is too close to the path, they have nowhere to go and a fall is nearly inevitable. In addition the worst

conditions are often at the side of the road – potholes, loose gravel, leaves, the natural sloping camber of the road, fallen leaves, shores etc – and cycling in a wider position can help avoid these;

6. Cycle behind and slightly outside a child – in that position you can see how they are riding, give encouragement and advice and also protect their position from approaching traffic;
7. Encourage regular shoulder checking – a large part of staying safe is staying seen and being aware of what is going on all round. Shoulder checking is a must before any change of position on the road, and before moving to the middle of the road to take up position to make a right-hand turn – you can check a child's observational skills by asking questions, perhaps about the make and colour of the car behind or in front;
8. For safe and comfortable riding a bike needs to be the right fit. A child should always ride a bike he/she can grow out of, not into. With the saddle at its lowest, the child should still be able to get both feet to the ground with legs straight. If a child cannot get both feet to the ground – hopping from tip toe to tip toe – stopping and control of the bike are hampered. Also, if a bike is too small – seated on the saddle extended full, yet feet are flat on the ground and knees are bent – control is also compromised and steering properly is difficult.