

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

Bicycle helmet laws for kids effective but not yet the norm

Every 3 days in the United States, a child is killed while riding a bicycle. In 2006, 95% of all bicyclists killed were not wearing helmets. Every day, 100 children are treated in emergency rooms for bicycle-related head injuries. Wearing a helmet reduces the risk of brain injury by about 90%.

These statistics underscore the importance of wearing helmets whenever children ride bikes, yet only 21 states have bicycle helmet laws for children. The CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health conducted a survey earlier this year to gauge current rates of children's helmet use, and to measure adults' opinions about cycle helmet laws for children.

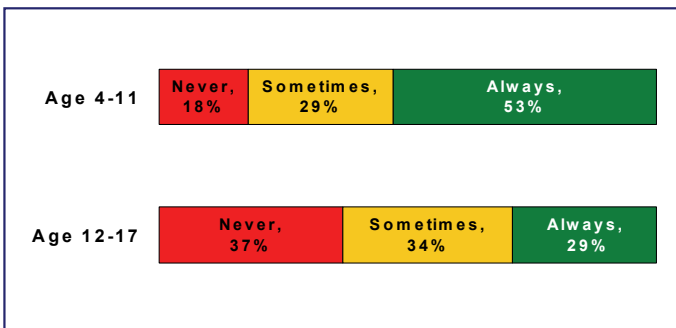
Bicycle Helmet Use

In this poll, 78% of parents report their children age 4-17 ride bicycles. Of these children,

- 42% *always* wear a helmet
- 31% *sometimes* wear a helmet
- 27% *never* wear a helmet

Older children age 12-17 are much less likely to wear a helmet than younger children age 4-11 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Bicycle Helmet Use Among Children



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Children in lower-income households were much less likely to wear a helmet than their counterparts in higher-income households (Table 1).

Report Highlights

- 1 in 4 children age 4-17 never wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.
- Nearly 1 in 2 children from the lowest income families never wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.
- Helmet use in places that have child bicycle helmet laws is more than twice as high as helmet use in areas without such laws.
- Nearly 9 in 10 adults support helmet laws for children.

Table 1. Bicycle Helmet Use for Children Age 4-17 by Family Household Income

	less than \$30,000	\$30,000 to < \$60,000	\$60,000 to < \$100,000	more than \$100,000
Children <i>always</i> wear a helmet	30%	39%	45%	52%
Children <i>sometimes</i> wear a helmet	22%	37%	32%	30%
Children <i>never</i> wear a helmet	48%	24%	23%	18%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Why Not Wear a Helmet?

Among parents who report that their children never wear a helmet;

- 32% believe helmets are too expensive
- 59% say that their children do not like wearing helmets

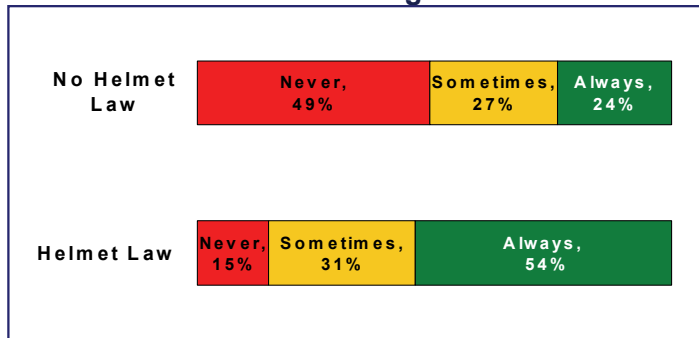
More than half (52%) of parents whose children never wear helmets believe that bicycle helmet laws are an important way to protect children and 57% would support bicycle helmet laws.

Helmet Laws, Higher Helmet Use

Among parents whose children ride bicycles, 36% indicated they live in an area that has a state or local bicycle helmet law, 23% said there is no helmet law and 41% are unsure about bicycle helmet laws in their community.

Child bicycle helmet use in areas with bicycle helmet laws is more than twice as high as helmet use in areas without such laws (Figure 2). In fact, in areas without a bicycle helmet law, nearly one-half of children age 4-17 never wear a helmet.

Figure 2. **Bicycle Helmet Laws and Frequency of Helmet Use for Children Age 4-17**



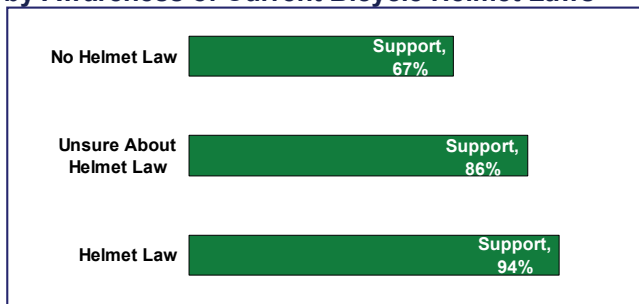
Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Strong Support for Helmet Laws

Overall, there is very strong support for helmet laws. Among all adults in the US, 86% favor bicycle helmet laws for children.

Support for helmet laws differs substantially, however, by whether adults report the presence of laws where they live. Adults who report that there is a helmet law for children in their state or locality show the greatest support for such laws (Figure 3).

Figure 3. **Support for Bicycle Helmet Laws for Children by Awareness of Current Bicycle Helmet Laws**



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Implications

Bicycle helmets save lives and reduce the severity of head injuries related to bicycle accidents. Based on findings from this poll, rates of children's helmet use are substantially higher when parents know that helmet laws are present than when there are no laws present.

We expect that broader implementation of state laws for helmet use would substantially reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries from bicycle accidents in the US—likely protecting hundreds to thousands of children per year. A substantial majority of respondents to this poll say that they support bicycle helmet laws. Several states currently have pending legislation on bicycle helmet laws and as other states consider such laws, the time may be right for advocates of helmet laws to move this agenda forward.

However, it is also evident from this poll that simply passing new laws may not be sufficient to change behavior. Because cost appears to be an issue for some families, it may be necessary to implement programs to provide free bicycle helmets to lower-income children. Other strategies should target teenage riders, who often do not wear helmets.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc. for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in January 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults aged 18 and older (n=2,125) with and without children from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 64% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error for this sample is plus or minus 1 to 9 percentage points. For results based on subgroups, the margin of error is higher.

Child Health Evaluation
and Research Unit



University of Michigan

**C.S. Mott Children's Hospital
National Poll on Children's Health**
Director: Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP
Associate Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH
Manager & Editor: Dianne C. Singer, MPH
Data Analyst: Amy T. Butchart, MPH
Contact us! Email: NPCH@med.umich.edu
<http://www.med.umich.edu/mott/npch>

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