

Helmets for the very young

The best information at hand to Bicycle Victoria suggests you shouldn't take children out on bikes or in a trailer or seat until they are about 12 months old.

One of the reasons is helmets. While you may find a helmet to fit the baby's head, the helmet may force the head forward due to the helmet's outer diameter size. The child needs not only to be old enough to fully support their head with the acceleration and deceleration on the bike (with the extra, albeit light, weight of a helmet), but they also need to be big enough that they are not forced into uncomfortable positions that will put pressure on their neck.

If you have doubts about helmet fit consult a good bike shop. The helmet should not slop about on the child's head – it should be firm but not tight. Helmets come with various thickness pads that mount on the inside of the helmet. These can be used to adjust fit but can't make a helmet the correct size. Kids helmets start at about 46cm diameter. Look for features such as a peak to protect baby's eyes from the sun, pinch proof clips on the chin strap and easy to use side straps to adjust fit.

Kid's heads get bigger as they grow (in more ways than one!) so they will need to upgrade to larger sizes as they get older. You may need to get a new size every year up to five years old – just like clothes and shoes.

Don't be tempted to try taking him or her out without a helmet as they are especially critical for babies in seats and trailers as their heads can hit the sides of the devices in sudden stops and starts or if the bike or trailer tips over or crashes.

Another reason not to take babies out on bikes before 12 months of age is the jolting from the ride: babies are usually directly over the axles in rear mounted bike seats and get a bit more of a rough ride. Also, unlike the rider, they cannot stand up and use their legs to absorb bumps – imagine having the stay seated while riding over the same bump and you get the idea of what a child in a seat goes through. A further reason is a baby's weaker neck strength.

If you have any doubts, consult with your pediatrician.