

Bike helmets

Don't hit the road without one.

The problem

Over 400 cyclists are seriously injured or killed on Victorian roads each year. Children are not the only cyclists involved, as about 60 per cent are adults.

Bike accidents occur in metropolitan and country locations, on quiet streets, bike paths, busy roads, in fact any place cyclists ride. Therefore it is important that a helmet is always worn when cycling.

Head injuries are a major cause of death and serious injury to cyclists.

Helmets work



The foam in a helmet is designed to spread the force of an impact and absorb this energy. This reduces the risk of head injury, when the head hits an object or the road.

Research shows that with an increase in the use of helmets, there has been a 70% drop in the number of Victorian cyclists killed or hospitalised through head injury.

The law

Bike helmets became compulsory in Victoria on 1 July 1990. This law applies on roads, bike paths, bike lanes, shared and segregated footways and other public places such as recreational parks and car parks.

There is a \$50 fine for not wearing a securely fitted and approved bike helmet. Approved helmets have the Australian Standards Mark.

Choosing a helmet



Always buy a helmet that has the Australian standards Mark and is marked as suitable for cycling.

For maximum comfort, choose a helmet that is lightweight. To stay as cool as possible choose a helmet that has good airflow through the ventilation holes. Helmet accessories and covers are available for protection from the sun.

The look, style and colour of a helmet all play an important role in determining whether or not the helmet will be worn. Younger riders, especially teenagers, are more likely to wear a helmet they have

helped to choose. The most important factor in comfort and safety, however, is a correctly fitting helmet – see below.

Maximum protection

A helmet will give you maximum protection only if:

- It is the right size and is correctly fitted
- It is correctly positioned
- The straps are correctly adjusted and the buckle is securely fastened
- It is properly cared for and in good condition

Helmet fit



Always try a helmet on before buying it. Different helmets will fit different heads as heads and helmets vary slightly in shape.

Your helmet should fit firmly and be comfortable to wear. If necessary, ask where helmets are sold or someone else who knows about fitting helmets correctly.

Approved helmets currently range in size from 46cm circumference for infants up to 65 cms (the [Headstart Model 180](#), manufactured in Australia. The largest helmet we know of - the Bell Kinghead – is available up to 66cm but is not currently imported into Australia, see the [Bell Helmet website](#)). Most widely available adult helmets range up to 62cm circumference. There are no tiny helmets on the market because nobody recommends taking a very young infant (under 12 months) on a bicycle.

Adjustment pads provided with the helmet may help make it fit the shape of your head better but will not make up for an incorrect size.

You may need to alter your hairstyle (e.g. your pony-tail) and remove large hair clips and earrings so that the helmet can sit properly and comfortably on your head.

When fitted correctly, it should **not** be possible to push the helmet backwards off your head, forwards to cover your eyes, or sideways to uncover the side of your head.

Helmet position



Your helmet should be squarely positioned on your head.

The rim of the helmet should sit on the forehead, just above the brows, and should not be tilted back to uncover the forehead.

Helmet straps



Helmet straps should be adjusted according to the instructions provided with the helmet. If necessary, ask where helmets are sold or someone who knows about adjusting the straps correctly.

Straps should

- Be adjusted so there is no slack when they are fastened
- Not be twisted
- Be re-adjusted if they become loose
- Be adjusted so that the buckle is securely fastened under the chin.

The strap on most helmets should form a 'V' shape just under the ear lobe.

Helmet care – don't damage your helmet

Your helmet will only protect you if it is in good condition. So treat your helmet carefully and regularly check it for wear and damage. Read the helmet care information provided with the helmet.

A helmet should be replaced if:

- The plastic shell is split, cracked or broken.
- The foam is crumbling, cracked or broken.
- It has been mistreated, dropped, suffered a hard impact, or involved in a crash. Helmets are designed to only work once. The foam may be damaged and unable to protect you in the way it was designed. This damage may not be visible.

Helmets may be seriously weakened by certain chemicals, including cleaning agents, adhesives, paints and solvents. Only use cleaning materials recommended by the manufacturer – this is usually soap and water.

Exceptions to the law

If you have a medical condition or your religion prevents you from wearing a helmet you may apply to VicRoads for an exemption from the road rules. The number to ring is 9854 2707. You must carry written evidence of the exemption with you to show to police officers or other authorized person.

Helmets only work once

After a crash you should replace the helmet. Like a Christmas cracker, they only work once.

Helmets get old

Ultraviolet light will decay the helmet. If your helmet is cracked, split, dented or crumbling or the straps are frayed it should be replaced. Three years is a good rule of thumb for replacement. If your helmet is quite old you will be pleasantly surprised how much lighter and more comfortable the new helmets are. They are also cooler in hot weather.

Safety colours are good but so is fashion

Helmets can look good. These days there are some great colours and styles. Parents will find a trendy helmet will be more likely to be worn than a daggy one in a safety colour.

Helmet accessories are useful

There are helmet covers to keep the cold out in winter and summer covers with back flaps and peaks. You can also get visors for many helmets that help keep out rain, wind-blown grit or sun. You can buy rear view mirrors that mount on your helmet and mounts that allow you to put a red flashing light on you helmet.

Prices vary

Helmets range from \$40 to over \$150. The more you pay the lighter the helmet and the more ventilation. Since all helmets need to meet safety standards you don't get more safety for more money. For helmets you pay more for comfort, looks and less weight.

There are fines for not wearing helmets

Police will book you for not wearing a helmet. You need to wear your helmet, even when riding off the road. The fine is currently \$50.

Further information

Most bike shops and many other retail outlets have a range of helmet and can advise you about buying and fitting a helmet or call Bicycle Victoria on 03 8636 8888 or 1800 639 634.

Photographs kindly arranged through Melbourne Parks and Waterways. Helmets kindly supplied by Lawrencia Cycles, Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn.