



Bicycle Network Mandatory Helmet Review

Opinion of Elliot Fishman, [Dr], [Institute for Sensible Transport]

1. *Do you believe it should be mandatory to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle? (If you believe it should be mandatory at some times but not others please describe when.)*

I believe there is insufficient evidence to make it clear one way or the other that helmets should be mandatory or not. There are pieces of evidence, but not the full body of evidence necessary to make a decision with such important ramifications.

So far, it would appear that there are two vocal sides to this debate. At one end of the spectrum are those that say mandatory helmet legislation (MHL) reduces cycling participation, and this has negative impacts for those that forgo cycling (in relation to physical activity etc), as well as make it more dangerous for those that continue to cycle, as it reverses the *safety in numbers* effect.

The other side of the debate (the pro-MHL camp) say that if you wear a helmet and are involved in a collision or fall, a helmet will reduce the chance of a head injury. The argument goes that if it is safer to ride with a helmet, everyone should ride with a helmet (MHL). The issue I have with this argument is that it appears to ignore the possibility that some people may not ride due to the MHL requirement. This might include some people that do not ride at all, as well as those that ride less often than they would otherwise. The evidence I have seen (from my own research, published in peer reviewed transport journals) as well as others, is that it *is* the case that MHL deters some people from riding.

Before one can reasonably answer the question BN have asked, better data is needed on the following questions:

- How many people/proportion of the population are deterred from riding due to MHL and how does this vary geographically, by age and gender?
- Of the people that are deterred, how much physical activity are they currently participating in (i.e. if they did cycle, would it be bringing them up from dangerously sedentary to closer to maintaining an adequate level of physical activity)?

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- Of the people who ride now, would they ride more if MHL was removed, and if so, how much more (in minutes and kilometres per week) and under what conditions?
- Of the people who ride now, would they continue wearing a helmet if MHL was removed, and how might this differ depending on their riding environment?
- Of the people who say they would ride more because they no longer had to wear a helmet, would this replace, or be in addition to, other forms of physical activity.
- How do all the above questions vary by gender, and age group?
- If cycling increased due to the removal of MHL, what impact is this likely to have on the risk of serious injury and fatality?

Ultimately, all the above questions are really intended on answering one global question – Are the Disability Adjusted Life Years¹ gained due to possible increases in cycling following a repeal of MHL larger than the Disability Adjusted Life Years lost due to a possible increases in head injury associated with less people wearing helmets?

Finding the scenario that maximizes healthy life years should be the goal. Only through a robust methodology designed to answer the above question can one be confident of which helmet scenario provides the largest net gain in healthy life years.

2. *What's your reasons for your answer to question one?*

As described above.

3. *Do you provide consent for your opinion to be made public?*

Yes

¹ http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/metrics_daly/en/



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4. *If no, are you happy if we say you provided an opinion but didn't want it made publicly available?*

Yes No

Signed:

Date: 22nd September 2017

Please send completed form to craigr@bicyclenetwork.com.au before 5pm, Friday 13 October, 2017.

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