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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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## Parents and Children: Pedal Your Way to Holiday Safety

A shiny new bicycle has been a favorite holiday gift for years. But just like some toys need batteries to operate correctly, a new bicycle needs certain equipment before children can take that first ride.

- **Helmet.** In Florida, children under age 16 must wear a properly-fitted helmet when riding bicycles – it's the law. Plus, it just makes sense. Three out of four bike accidents involve an injury to the head, and a crash could mean permanent brain damage or death for a child who doesn't wear a helmet while riding. It is important that the helmet is well-fitted to the child's head. Don't assume that a sibling's helmet will fit properly. Each child is different. A helmet fits well if it:
  - Meets the standards of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (this is a Federal law)
  - Sits level on the child's head
  - Isn't tilted forward or backward
  - Has strong, wide straps that fasten snugly under the chin
  - Is tight enough so that after fastening, no sudden pulling or twisting could move it aroundChildren should always wear a helmet, even when riding in their own driveway. And remember: Adults are important role models for children. If you wear a bike helmet, your children are more likely to wear helmets, too.
- **Fit.** Make sure the bicycle is the proper size and, if adjustable, is set at the right height for the child right now. Parents sometimes make the mistake of "buying up" a bike in size with the idea the child will grow into it soon enough. While it might sound like a good idea, riding a bike that is too big will create problems until the child sits comfortably, balances on the seat and touches the ground.
- **Lights and reflectors.** Florida law requires that bicycles must be equipped with a lamp on the front that shines a bright white light 500 feet and a red reflector and lamp that is visible 600 feet on the rear of the bicycle. Extra lighting and reflectors are recommended. The risk of injury or death increases dramatically in night bike riding.
- **Rules of the road.** Before allowing children to ride on main roads, make sure they know basic rules, such as riding "with" traffic, riding single-file, stopping at stop signs and red lights, paying careful attention at intersections and looking both ways before crossing the street and using their left arm as a hand signal.
- **Shoes.** Children should always wear closed-toed shoes when riding a bike. Many bike accidents occur because young riders are wearing sandals, flip flops or even riding with bare feet.

There's still time to make that first ride a safe ride this holiday season. Plan ahead, and when you're buying those all-important batteries for other gifts – buy the safety equipment your child will need for that brand-new bike!

For more information about bike safety, visit these sites: [www.usa.safekids.org/](http://www.usa.safekids.org/) [www.cpsc.gov/](http://www.cpsc.gov/) [www.kidshealth.org/kid/watch/out/bike\\_safety.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/watch/out/bike_safety.html) or [http://www.dot.state.fl.us/safety/ped\\_bike/ped\\_bike.htm](http://www.dot.state.fl.us/safety/ped_bike/ped_bike.htm)

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