

Trends and Issues paper: *Bicycle safety for Queensland children and young people*

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Bicycle safety for children and young people

Introduction

Bicycle riding can be a positive experience for children and young people that builds confidence, independence and promotes healthy recreation. However, these benefits are dependent upon safe bicycle riding practices. This paper examines safety issues for children and young people who have died in bicycle-related incidents, and outlines areas of concern for the Queensland Commission.

Evidence

Information on all children and young people who died in Queensland as a result of a bicycle incident between 2004 and 2011 has been collected from the Commission's Child Death Register and analysed with a focus on the risk factors associated with these particular deaths.

Between 1 January 2004 and 31 December 2011, **12** children and young people died in bicycle incidents in Queensland.

All the children and young people were male. Two children were aged between 5-9 years, 5 young people were 10-14 years of age and 5 young people were between 15-17 years.

The majority of incidents involved the young cyclists being hit by motorists, causing fatal injuries. In a large number of cases, the young cyclists were engaging in intentional risk-taking behaviour while others were unintentionally increasing their risk due to lack of riding experience, such as unexpectedly crossing roads without waiting for traffic to clear, riding at night in poorly lit areas or riding on the wrong side of the road. None of the incidents featured a motorist who was

considered criminally responsible for the death of the child or young person.

Table 1 below shows that most incidents occurred on residential streets with a maximum speed limit of 60km/hr, closely followed by major roads with a speed limit between 60-90km/hr. Children aged 10-14 years were most likely to have been killed in an incident while riding to school in the morning, with teenagers aged 15-17 years most likely to be killed in incidents occurring after school and in the evening.

Table 1. Number of bicycle-related deaths by place of incident

Place of Incident	Age Category (years)			Total
	5-9	10-14	15-17	
Highway (100-110km/hr)	0	1	1	2
Major road (60-90km/hr)	0	2	2	4
Residential street (up to 60km/hr)	1	2	2	5
Private property (no posted limit)	1	0	0	1
Total	2	5	5	12

Source: Queensland Child Death Register, 2004-11

Current Safety Areas of concern

Child cyclists on major roads and highways

Three of the 5 young people aged 10-14 years were riding on roads with a speed limit of 80km/hr or more. These children were all riding unaccompanied to school or school bus stops during a peak traffic period. In two of these three incidents, the roads did not have any designated bicycle lanes. This can potentially increase the risk for cyclists and

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also for motorists (if required to veer onto the incorrect side of the road to avoid cyclists).

Unaccompanied child cyclists

Kidsafe QLD advises that child cyclists should be accompanied by an adult until at least 10 years of age. Two children who died in bicycle incidents were 10 years of age and were riding unaccompanied for some distance on major roads during a peak traffic period.

The Commission recommends that primary school-aged children should only ride on major roads when accompanied by an adult who is able to provide appropriate supervision and direction.

The use of bicycle helmets

It is compulsory in Queensland to wear an approved bicycle helmet while cycling. The Commission is concerned about the absence or incorrect fastening of bicycle helmets in bicycle fatalities. As outlined below in Table 2, only 4 of the 12 children who have died in bicycle incidents in Queensland since 2004 were known to be wearing helmets. There is further evidence to suggest that in at least one of the 4 instances where helmets were worn, the helmet may not have been fastened and in another incident the helmet may not have been the correct size for the child.

Table 2. Number of children known to be wearing a helmet

Bicycle Helmet Worn	Age Category (years)			Total
	5-9	10-14	15-17	
Yes (Correct use)	0	2	0	2
Yes (Incorrect use)	0	2	0	2
No	1	1	5	7
Unknown	1	0	0	1
Total	2	5	5	12

Source: Queensland Child Death Register, 2004-12

Alcohol and drug use

Three young people aged 15-17 years were affected by drugs or alcohol at the time of their deaths.

Conclusion

The Commission supports initiatives to address road safety for children developed by the Department of Transport and Main Roads and the Department of Education, such as Road Safety Matters and the Safe School Travel scheme. Kidsafe QLD has also produced useful fact sheets on bicycle safety.

The Commission is committed to helping reduce the incidence of children and young people who die in bicycle incidents in Queensland and has formed partnerships with stakeholders to promote key education and prevention messages to improve the safety of children and young people riding bicycles in Queensland.

For further bicycle safety information go to:

Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads

www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport/cycling.aspx

KidSafe (Queensland)

http://www.kidsafeqld.com.au/images/stories/pdfs/Bike%20Safety_May09.pdf



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