



## DOUGLAS COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Seventh Judicial District  
Judicial & Law Enforcement Center  
111 E. 11th Street  
Lawrence, KS 66044-2912  
(785) 841-0211 Fax (785) 832-8202  
www.dgcoda.com

**Charles E. Branson**  
District Attorney

September 30, 2009

Dear Douglas County Citizens:

With the school year back in full swing and with the upcoming 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Lawrence Bicycle Club's Octoginta that is expected to bring 2,000 or more cyclists to Douglas County, I want to ask everyone to take a moment and think about the importance of bicycle safety.

My family and I enjoy cycling. There are so many great paths to enjoy from the Kansas River Trail, to the path along K-10 Highway, not to mention the simple freedom of riding and enjoying our beautiful city and county.

Unfortunately, Lawrence and Douglas County are not immune to the tragedy of bicycle accidents. Bicycle accidents do not discriminate; it does not care if you are rich, poor, highly educated, an avid or an occasional rider. Once you, your children, your family or loved ones step onto a bicycle, you and they have the potential to become another bicycle accident statistic.

According to the Brain Injury Association of America, each year about 567,000 victims go to hospital emergency departments with bicycle related injuries. About 350,000 of those patients are children under the age of 15. Unfortunately, about 900 of those injured do not survive.

My goal is not to scare the citizens of Douglas County into not riding, but to make certain each of us are doing everything we can to insure our own personal safety and the safety of our family and friends. Here are a few tips:

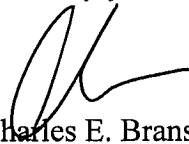
- ▶ Always wear a helmet.
- ▶ Even when you have the right of way, do not assume a motorized vehicle sees you the bicyclist will lose every time and when you are laying in the ER having the right of way will not fix your broken body.
- ▶ Never wear an I-Pod or other music device when riding - you completely lose a sense that can warn you of danger.
- ▶ Always use head and tail lights when bicycling at night, not only is it the law, but you want to do everything you can to insure vehicles see you.
- ▶ Sidewalks do not necessarily insure your safety, almost half of all bicycle crashes occur in driveways and on sidewalks.

► If bicycling on roadways, use bike lanes if possible. There are bicycle lanes throughout much of Lawrence. Lanes were just added along both sides of Ninth Street west of Downtown.

If you are not a bicyclist, then please remember as a motorist the bicyclist riding next to you has every entitlement to the road you share. Contrary to popular belief, Kansas bicyclists are legally permitted to ride two abreast\*. When overtaking a bicyclist, give them plenty of room due to the wind current that may be created by your vehicle. The current alone can cause a crash. Be especially mindful of our children who may be riding to and from school.

Biking is an excellent way to increase physical activity, to combat obesity and it gives our environment a break from the pollutants from vehicles, but those are moot issues if you are injured. Have fun, be safe and it is a win/win!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles E. Branson', written over a solid black rectangular redaction box.

Charles E. Branson

\* Other local ordinances may apply.

## Bike Safety

Bike riding is a great way to get exercise and fresh air and share time as a family. But before you and the kids rush out and start pedaling, there's an important factor that you need to consider — safety.

### Helmet Basics

Bicycle helmet use should not be optional for anyone in your family, no matter where you are or how short the ride. In many states it's the law.

Here's why: Most bike accidents involve a head injury, so a crash could mean permanent brain damage or death for someone who doesn't wear one while riding. In fact, each year in the United States, about half a million kids are seriously injured in bicycle-related accidents, and most of those injuries could have been avoided if a helmet was worn.

Here are some things to keep in mind when buying a helmet:

- Pick bright colors that are visible to drivers and other cyclists.
- Look for a helmet that's well ventilated.
- Make sure that the helmet has a CPSC or Snell sticker inside. These indicate that the helmet meets standards set by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) or the Snell Memorial Foundation, a nonprofit group that tests helmet safety.
- Make sure your child's helmet fits correctly and can be adjusted.

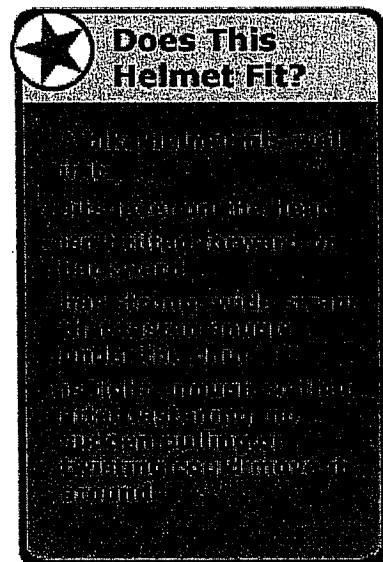
You should be able to get help finding a well-fitting helmet and adjusting it properly at any bicycle store.

When kids wear a helmet, make sure that the straps are fastened. Also make sure they don't wear any other hat underneath it.

Be sure to replace any helmet made before 1999. If your child hits any surface hard while wearing a helmet, replace it — helmets lose their capacity to absorb shock after taking serious hits.

A few bike helmets can be used as protection for other activities, but in general, they're best suited to biking. Most helmets are made for one specific type of activity — for example, special helmets also are made for inline skating, baseball, and snowmobiling.

Kids should not wear any helmet when they're on a playground or climbing a tree — there is a risk of strangulation from the chin strap during these types of activities.



### Safe Clothing

What kids wear when riding a bike is also very important for safety:

- Fluorescent or bright-colored clothes will help kids be visible on the road. (Avoid dark clothes, especially during early dusk and twilight hours.)
- Lightweight clothes will help them avoid becoming overheated.

- Pant legs shouldn't be too loose-fitting or flared. These can get caught up in the chain while riding.
- If your child wears a backpack while riding, make sure the straps are tied up and can't get tangled in the spokes of the wheels.
- Choose shoes that grip the bike's pedals. Cleats, shoes with heels, or flip-flops can all create problems while riding. Kids should never ride barefoot!

### **Rules of the Road for Bike Riding**

Here are some must-know safety tips to teach kids:

- Stop at all stop signs and obey traffic lights just as cars do. Yield to pedestrians, stop at red lights, and be especially careful at intersections.
- Always ride in the same direction as cars do. Never ride against traffic.
- Try to use bike lanes or designated bike routes whenever you can — not the sidewalk!
- Never ride at dusk or in the dark.
- Always stop and check for traffic in both directions when leaving a driveway, an alley, or a curb.
- Watch traffic closely for turning cars or cars leaving driveways.
- Don't ride too close to parked cars — doors can open suddenly.
- Always walk a bike across busy intersections using the crosswalk and following traffic signals.
- When riding in a group, always ride single file on the street.
- When passing other bikers or people on the street, always pass to their left and call out "On your left!" so they'll watch for you.
- Never share the seat with a friend or ride on the handlebars — only one person should be on a bike at a time. It's easy to lose balance or suddenly swerve into traffic when riding with a passenger.
- Never wear headphones while biking — it's essential to hear everyone else on the road at all times.
- Never stand up while riding a bike.
- Never hitch a ride on a moving vehicle.
- Never change directions or lanes without first looking behind you, and always use the correct hand signals. Use your left arm for all hand signals:
  - **Left turn:** After checking behind you, hold your arm straight out to the left and ride forward slowly.
  - **Stop:** After checking behind you, bend your elbow, pointing your arm downward in an upside down "L" shape and come to a stop.
  - **Right turn:** After checking behind you, bend your elbow, holding your arm up in an "L" shape, and ride forward slowly. Or, hold your right arm straight out from your side.



**Left turn**



**Stop**



**Right turn**



**Right turn alternative**

### **Bike Maintenance**

Check your child's bike at least once each season to keep it safe and well-maintained.

Be sure to check:

- tires — inflate to the pressure that's recommended on the sidewall of the tire
- chain — oil it regularly and remove dirt
- handlebars — adjust for height as your child grows and tighten all bolts
- brakes — check for frayed cables and replace worn-out brake pads
- seat — keep the seat level and adjust for height as needed

### **Making Safety a Family Affair**

One of the best ways to help kids learn safe bike riding is to set a good example by following the rules of the road yourself. Go for bike rides with your kids so you can show them what safe riding looks like. It's also a great way to stay active as a family and get valuable together time that you'll all enjoy!

Reviewed by: Kate Cronan, MD

Date reviewed: May 2007

**Nemours.**

Note: All information on KidsHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

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