

California Dashboard: Education and Legislative Issues



Use Your Head: Wear a Helmet!

By Hong Zhang
Senior Program Director
Snell Memorial Foundation, Inc.

During the spring and summer months bicycling, skateboarding, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle use, and motorcycling can be fun outdoor activities. While enjoying these activities, wearing a helmet will protect your head and skull. California law requires that anyone under the age of 18 must wear a helmet while riding a bicycle on a street, bikeway, or public bicycle path or trail. Children sitting in restraining seats or being towed in a trailer behind a bicycle must also wear a helmet. Additionally, California requires that anyone under 18 wear a helmet while riding a scooter, skateboard or while using inline skates (http://www.ehow.com/about_7218820_ca_lifornia-bicycle-helmet-law_.html).

Since its founding in 1957, the Snell Memorial Foundation has been a leader in helmet safety, focused on developing standards for helmet safety, research, testing, and education (Snell, 2015).

Properly used during these activities, protective helmets can greatly reduce the risk of serious head injury from the impact of a crash. Helmets work in space and time to keep impact forces within limits the head and brain can tolerate.

By spreading the impact forces over a broader area of the head and skull, helmets work in space to shield you from severe head injury. How does the helmet work? Instead of a highly- concentrated impact with the threat of skull fracture and penetration injuries, your head gets a distributed impact. So although the total force is the same, the pressures against the skull are much lower.

This same principle applies to using a thumbtack. The broad cap of the thumbtack against your thumb concentrates the force applied on the thumbtack's tiny point so that you can drive it easily into a wall or a bulletin board. If you turn the thumbtack around so that the tiny point is against your thumb and the broad cap is against a solid surface, the only result is pain.

Helmets also work in time by allowing the impact to last longer. Since the impact is longer, the forces that can cause injury can be five to ten times lower against the head and skull. Without a helmet, the impact event is likely to last only a millisecond or

Helmet Do's and Don'ts

- Try the helmet on before purchase. Make sure it fits snugly and comfortably.
- Wear your helmet low over your forehead just above your eye brows.
- Always buckle the chinstrap securely leaving no more than two fingers' space between the strap and your chin.
- Always replace a helmet after a head impact.
- Never trust a second-hand helmet. Damage may be invisible.
- Routinely replace your helmet after five years of use with the clock starting the first time the helmet is worn.
- Clean your helmet with mild soap and water only.
- Wear your helmet every time you ride.

Source: Snell Memorial Foundation
<http://www.smf.org/>

two but with a good helmet, it might last five to ten times longer, potentially lessening injury to the head and skull.

The same principle applies to stopping a bus. If the driver slams on the brakes in a panic, the sudden forces will throw the passengers around the bus, creating all sorts of confusion. But if the driver is alert, he can take the time to bring the bus to a gentle, controlled stop that will have the passengers hardly looking up from their cell phones. In this example, your skull is the bus and your brain, the passengers, and they'll be better protected by a good helmet, or driver, that creates a gentle stop in a crash event.

Even the best helmet may not be enough though. But good judgment, good skills, and good gear can help protect your head and skull during a crash.

The Snell Memorial Foundation offers a 4-minute-long white board story, covering this exciting learning may be used teachers in the classroom, by parents and guardians, as well as students. Visit the Snell Web site online at <http://www.smf.org/safetycenter.php> for informative video and activities. A donation suggestion is listed with activities to help offset the costs of materials development as the foundation is a not-for-profit agency.

Sources: The Snell Memorial Foundation, Inc.,
<http://www.smf.org/home>

eHow, <http://www.ehow.com/>