a family guide to Bike Ed January 2009
Bike Ed is a program designed for children in primary school to learn how to ride safely on paths and on the road. The program includes classroom based and practical riding activities, but needs the support of parents/carers to be successful.

Bike Ed is the approved Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) bicycle education program for primary schools. The program was developed by VicRoads and is supported by the DEECD.

Parents/carers can play a key role in supporting their child’s learning in Bike Ed. They should ensure their child has plenty of time, under adult supervision, to practise the skills they are learning at school. Parents/carers can volunteer to assist in running a Bike Ed program in their child’s school. They can also undertake bicycle education instructor training through the approved DEECD provider. For details of programs available visit:

# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why ride a bicycle?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can children learn to cycle safely?</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riding a safe bicycle</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing a simple bicycle safety check</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips for buying a new bicycle</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing the right riding gear</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle helmets - they’re vital!</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying a helmet</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking after helmets</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What clothing to wear</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling on paths - sharing with others safety</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy on paths</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangers on paths</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places to ride</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riding together</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to ride safely on the road</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways to help prepare children to ride safely on the road</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe road riding checklist</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web links</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why ride a bicycle?

Bicycles are an environmentally friendly, efficient and healthy way to travel. With the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, bicycles are a clean alternative transport to cars. Bicycles are an efficient way to travel, especially for local trips. Cycling regularly is also a great way to keep fit and improve health for children and the whole family.
How can children learn to cycle safely?

Before the age of 12 years children should not ride a bicycle on the road without adult supervision. Even when riding on footpaths and bike paths there are points at which roads need to be crossed. The reality is that most children, until around the age of 12 years, have not developed the necessary skills to be able to ride safely in or near traffic. To develop these skills children need lots of help and practise under the supervision of an adult.

Children can learn to ride from a young age and will copy the behaviours of their parents/carers when it comes to being safe as a cyclist.

Parents/carers can also support their children’s learning in Bike Ed by providing opportunities to practise skills developed during the program.

It is important that parents/carers ensure that the whole family:

- wear an approved bicycle helmet when riding
- wear bright and light coloured clothing so they can be easily seen by other road users
- keep their bicycles in good working order
- follow all road rules and ride in a safe manner.
Riding a safe bicycle

Doing a simple bicycle safety check
A simple safety check should be carried out regularly. Children’s bikes should be the correct size and checked at a bicycle shop to ensure all components are working effectively.

Size
Riding a bicycle that is too big or too small can cause a child to lose control of the bicycle and may result in injury. A child’s bike should fit so that they can straddle their bike with both feet flat on the ground. On road bikes, the clearance between the crossbar of the frame (or where one would be) should be about 3 centimetres and on a BMX and mountain bike, the clearance should be 5–10 centimetres.
**Seat**

A bicycle seat should not tilt or move from side to side or have any damage, such as cracks or broken springs. If these are present it may need to be replaced. It should sit flat and be straight in line with the top tube. The seat stem should not sit above the maximum height mark.

---

**Safety Tips**

Children under 12 years of age should not ride on roads in traffic without adult supervision.

---

**Handlebar**

Handlebar ends should be covered, as exposed handlebar ends can severely injure children in a fall, and handlebar grips must be secure and not loose. When seated, the rider’s arms should be slightly bent when holding the handlebar grips and their knees should not hit the handlebar.
Warning device

It is a legal requirement that bikes have a bell or horn in working order that can be clearly heard. These warning devices are used to warn other road users that a cyclist is approaching.

Brakes

It is a legal requirement that all bikes have a working front and rear brake. When the brakes are applied, the wheels should not turn and there should be a gap between the brake levers and the handlebar.

Safety Tips

It is recommended that children do not ride at night, because of the added risk.

Most child bicycle crashes do not involve a car or another vehicle. Rider inexperience and not keeping a lookout for dangers are often the causes.
Wheels and tyres

Look for loose wheel nuts or broken spokes. Check that the wheels spin freely. Check that tyres are not worn and are fully inflated. When pressed, if the tyre is pumped up enough, it will not depress. The manufacturer’s recommended pressure is embossed on the wall of the tyre.

Pedals

Check both pedals are not worn or damaged and that they spin freely when tapped sharply with your fingers. Check the crank is tight.

Safety Tips

Practice makes perfect. Cycle together when your child practises the skills they are learning in Bike Ed. Be enthusiastic, have fun and enjoy cycling.

When children are cycling with their friends, their concentration may be poor and their cycling behaviour unsafe.
Quick releases
Check that any quick release mechanisms on wheels are tight and folded upwards.

Chain
Check the chain is clean, works smoothly without jumping and is not loose. Keep it lightly oiled and ensure it is dry and free of rust.

When are lights needed?
Riding at night or in weather conditions where there is reduced visibility is not recommended. By law any bike ridden at these times must be fitted with working lights. There should be a white headlight and red tail light which can both be seen for 200 metres. The bicycle should also be fitted with a red rear reflector that is visible for at least 50 metres.

Remember: brakes, tyres and quick releases should be checked each time before riding.
TIPS FOR BUYING A NEW BICYCLE

Bicycles need to be the right size for the rider. Buying a bicycle for a child to ‘grow into’ is dangerous.

Use the information in this guide, and seek the advice of reputable bicycle retailers who will be able to help you to make the right choice.

Ideas for family activities

• Check the safety of family bicycles with children. Remind them of the key items to be checked. Use the information provided in this guide.

• Help children to prepare a bicycle safety checklist. Ask what they think should be included. Use the information provided in this guide to help. The checklist can be displayed where family bicycles are stored.
Bicycle helmets- they’re vital!

It is compulsory to wear a bicycle helmet when riding a bicycle. By law, every bicycle rider (and passenger) must wear an approved helmet that is certified to meet the Australian Standard AS/NZS 2063.

Head injuries are the major cause of death and serious injury to cyclists, therefore wearing a helmet which is the correct size and fits firmly and comfortably on your child’s head can help protect them from head injuries and save lives.

As part of the Bike Ed program, a bicycle helmet check is carried out and children are shown how to correctly adjust and wear their helmet.

It is important that everyone wears a helmet when cycling both on and off roads. You are the best role model for your child so ensure you lead by example.

Buying a helmet

It is essential to buy a helmet that is the correct fit. Do not buy a helmet for a child to ‘grow into’. Helmets come in a variety of shapes, sizes and
colours, and some shapes will fit different heads better than others. A helmet which is the correct size should sit down firmly and comfortably on a child’s head without moving from side to side. A helmet that does not fit correctly is unsafe, as it may move or slip off in a fall or crash. Let children choose the helmet that they like, as they will be more likely to wear it. Have the helmet fitted correctly while in the shop.

**Looking after helmets**

The helmet must be in good condition if it is to protect the rider, and helmets should be checked regularly for damage. Helmets that have been thrown around or treated roughly may need to be replaced. You can clean helmets with water and mild soap, but don’t use any other cleaning products as they may damage or weaken the helmet.

**What clothing to wear**

Bicycles are small in comparison to other vehicles on the road and can be difficult to see. Because of this it is important that children and all family members are encouraged to wear light and bright coloured clothing when riding.

Shoes which are enclosed and have a non slip sole that provides traction should be worn. Laces should be tidy. It is not safe to ride barefoot, in thongs or sandals.
Ideas for family activities

- Encourage children to check the helmets belonging to family members, based on what they have learned in Bike Ed. Help them to design a safety certificate to be awarded to each helmet owner in the family.
- Using the Internet, conduct a research project about bicycle helmets, their importance, their development over time and how they assist a cyclist in a crash.
- Have each family member decide on some light and bright coloured clothing that they will wear each time they ride.
- Agree on a family cycling rule: ‘No helmet, no ride!’

Wearing a cap under a helmet may affect the way the helmet fits and so reduce its effectiveness in a crash.

Cyclists are more easily seen if they are wearing light or brightly coloured clothing.

Websites
For more information visit:

www.virtualbike.com.au
www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au
Safety Tips

Cycling on paths- sharing with others safely

There are many places to cycle off-road, such as footpaths, bicycle paths, shared footways and bush tracks. These places are used by lots of people for different purposes, so your child needs to learn how to share the path with other users.

As part of the Bike Ed program children learn about riding safely, looking out for hazards and sharing paths with other people. Many crashes involving children occur off-road, where children believe they are safe. When children are cycling with their friends, their concentration may be poor and their cycling behaviour unsafe. Encourage your child to act responsibly and think for themselves, and not just follow the group.

Protect your feet when you ride. Don’t ride barefoot, in thongs or sandals.

Wear a helmet for all cycling activities. Helmets help protect cyclists from head injury and save lives.

Protect your feet when you ride. Don’t ride barefoot, in thongs or sandals.

Wear a helmet for all cycling activities. Helmets help protect cyclists from head injury and save lives.
**Courtesay on paths**
When riding on paths there are rules that need to be followed for everyone’s safety:

- keep to the left of the path
- don’t ride too fast or do anything unexpected
- let others know that you are approaching by sounding your warning signal, such as using the bell or calling out
- give way to pedestrians
- obey signs along the path and ride in single file, especially on shared footways
- ride in pairs only when the path is wide enough and when it is safe.

**Dangers on paths**
There are many dangers to watch out for. These may include:

- other path users - be extra careful near small children or older people
- dogs or other animals
- driveways, laneways or places where the path crosses a road
- hazards such as changes in the surface of the path, steep hills, puddles, pot-holes, blind corners and broken glass.

If a road has to be crossed, the rider should stop, dismount and walk across.
Places to ride

Children under 12 years of age may ride on the footpath, and so too can adults if they are supervising bicycle riders under the age of 12. Riders 12 years or older must use bicycle paths or the road.

Footpaths are made for people to walk on and cyclists must be very careful when riding on them. Cyclists must ensure they keep left and give way to any pedestrians on the footpath, laneways or places where the path crosses the road. Parents/carers should talk about what this means for cyclists on the path and discuss possible dangers with their children.

Riding together

Children will become more competent cyclists if parents/carers are actively involved and spend time helping them to develop their skills. When parents/carers ride with children and show them correct and safe behaviours, they turn an enjoyable activity into a valuable learning opportunity.
Ideas for family activities

• A good way to practise the skills children have learned is to plan a ride using paths. Make it an adventure. Go to a new area with interesting things to see and explore. Ride together as a family and take a picnic with you. Ideally an adult should ride behind and in front of children on these rides.

• Go cycling with the family, using paths and stop to discuss potential hazards you see along the way. Point out driveways, laneways or places where the path crosses the road. Talk about what this means for cyclists on the path, possible dangers and ways to deal with these situations safely. Encourage polite behaviour to other path users (use the information in this guide).

Websites
For more information about cycling on paths and cycling routes visit:
www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
www.bv.com.au
www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au
Learning to ride safely on the road

It is recommended that children under 12 years of age do not ride on the road without adult supervision, as they are yet to develop the understanding, skills and experience to cope with traffic. Adult supervision is essential until a child can demonstrate good bicycle control, behave safely when riding and show understanding of the road rules.

The checklist on the next page should help parents/carers decide when their child is ready to ride without adult supervision.

Ways to help prepare children to ride safely on the road

There are numerous ways to reach a destination. Consider safer routes that have left hand turns rather than right hand turns, avoid busy roads and use quieter streets or paths if available.

Avoid riding at night because of the added risk. If a child must ride at night, make sure the bicycle has a working headlight, tail light and reflectors. Wearing reflective clothing will also increase visibility. The key to riding at night is to be visible.

When riding as a family or in a group, keep together on the road. If possible, position an adult in the lead and at the back of the group.

Parents/carers should make sure they ride as much as possible with their children on the road, to let them practise their skills. Make this serve another purpose, such as riding to buy a newspaper or milk at the local shop. Use a backpack or secure basket or carrier to carry items.
Safe road riding checklist

To ride on the road safely a cyclist needs to be able to:

- communicate with other road users and signal their intentions
- look ahead & scan the road and surroundings for potential hazards
- ride in a straight line, one metre out from the kerb or parked cars without veering to the right or left
- keep both hands on the handlebar at all times, except when signalling turns
- plan to avoid heavy traffic areas and choose the safest route
- keep a safe distance from other vehicles in order to see and be seen
- understand and obey road rules
- wear an approved helmet correctly fitted and adjusted without being reminded
- wear protective clothing which is light or brightly coloured without being reminded
- ride responsibly when cycling with friends.

These skills and knowledge are taught as part of the Bike Ed program. However, parents/carers should make sure that children can demonstrate and show understanding of these points. They should take the time to discuss and practise these skills together.
Ideas for family activities

- Research road rules for all vehicles on the road using the Internet. Discuss these with your children, and specifically those which relate to cycling on the road. Have a family road rules quiz. You might be surprised!
- Plan the safest cycling route to school or to a friend’s house. You could draw a map of the route and identify any hazards to avoid along the way. Practise riding the route with your children.
- Plan a family ride to an interesting destination. This could be for a picnic and possibly involve using public transport on the way. For longer rides take water bottles, food, and wear sunscreen. In case of breakdowns, take a basic tool kit, puncture repair kit, spare tyre tube and a mobile phone.
- Look out for community bicycle rides. These are often advertised in newspapers and magazines or community newsletters. They are great fun and a good chance to practise on-road riding skills.

Websites

Further information to ensure your family’s safety when riding on the road visit:

www.virtualbike.com.au
www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
Web Links

VicRoads  www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
Contains information about cycling safety road laws and has maps of bicycle routes and paths both on and off road across Victoria. It also has Crashstats, which is an online crash database for all types of road users, that can be searched for information on a local area.

Go For Your Life  www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au
Contains cycling safety information, where to ride and maps of the bicycle network around Victoria.

Virtual Bike  www.virtualbike.com.au
Victoria Police has developed this website to provide information that will enable cyclists to develop safe, effective and practical strategies when riding a bicycle. It provides advice on safety and security.

Bicycle Victoria  www.bv.com.au
Bicycle Victoria is a community organisation dedicated to encouraging more people to cycle. The website contains advice and tips for cyclists, details of organised ride events and links to bicycle groups and organisations.