

SAFETY WARNING!



A cycle helmet may make you *feel* safer.
A cycle helmet may make you *look* safer.
But it may not make you *be* safer.

Whether or not to use a helmet should be *your informed choice*, and you should be given easy access to the main facts and arguments on both sides.

WHY THIS LEAFLET?

Spokes has no wish to re-ignite the helmet debate. We'd rather use all our time promoting cycling – a healthy way of getting about for daily travel. But unfortunately we have reached the position where some major charity bike rides now prohibit young adults if not helmeted; cyclists report being shouted at for not being helmeted; and a climate is growing in which compulsion could happen.

Using a helmet is a choice you should be allowed to make yourself in full knowledge of all aspects. It should be about balancing all the pros and the cons. It is *not* just a commonsense question of convenience versus safety.

PROS and CONS

Helmet advertisers, promoters and government agencies tell us the benefits but we are never told the downsides: yet there is evidence on both sides. Crashes and injuries do occur as a result of helmet risks. Compulsion or heavy promotion put some people off, whether by making cycling seem risky, a hassle or uncool - so health benefits are lost.

WHAT NEXT?

Overall, the pro/anti helmet balance is unclear, but people need to be given an informed choice, not just the pro-arguments. Helmet-wearers may also be safer if they have been made aware that helmets provide little help in crashes with motor vehicles - and that drivers may come closer.

♦ **Spokes will not in future publicise events involving helmet compulsion.** We will also only circulate flyers and give website links for events where adverts, photos, etc are not helmet-dominated. *We call on other organisations concerned about public health to do the same.*

♦ **Organisations** such as the **police** and **Cycling Scotland** should use a mix of helmeted and unhelmeted pictures, and should mention cons as well as pros, to enable informed choice.

♦ **Helmet manufacturers and sales outlets**, in the interest of public safety, should have to make clear on boxes and in sales literature a helmet's impact design speed (it's usually around 12mph) and potential risks as well as benefits.

If after reading this rather intense leaflet you'd like some fun, enjoyment and a new perspective on cycling, take a look at ...
www.copenhagencyclechic.com.

♦ A well-fitted helmet will help in certain crashes, notably if your head hits a hard object like a pavement straight-on. But it is not designed for anything like the closing speed of a car/bike crash.

♦ If you are helmeted, and 'look' safe, drivers on average give you less space when overtaking you. [www.bath.ac.uk/news/articles/archive/overtaking110906.html and www.drianwalker.com/overtaking]

Advice by motorists to motorists (and to cyclists!)
"Drivers often think a helmeted cyclist is 100% safe - they are not" [carbuzz.co.uk/blog/Drivers-more-cyclist-aware]

♦ When helmeted, some cyclists feel confident to tackle things they would not otherwise, such as faster roads. Youngsters may feel they are Evel Knievel or be confident to go downhill too fast.

♦ Helmets can cause or worsen head/brain injury if hit at an angle making the neck rotate too fast or far. [www.cyclehelmets.org/1039.html]

♦ One of the best ways to improve cycling safety - and public health - is to get more cyclists on the road. Yet helmet compulsion or heavy promotion reduces cycling. It's the paradox where a benefit to each individual, whether perceived or real, can bring a negative effect on the group as a whole.

CYCLING: HEALTHY & SAFE

Cycling seems dangerous to many, and is often presented as dangerous, yet is as safe as or safer than many common daily activities like football or gardening [www.cyclehelmets.org/1026.html#time].

For teen/20s males, cycling is *far* safer than driving - and presents far less risk to others.

CAR OCCUPANT DEATHS

Around 50% of car occupant deaths have serious head injury. Adelaide University research suggests a hard-shell headband with energy-absorbing honeycomb liner significantly reduces the chance of head injury. The case for car headbands seems as good as that for cycle helmets, except that headbands have fewer disadvantages - so why are only bike helmets promoted? [www.copenhagenize.com/2009/10 See 27 Oct]



THE EVIDENCE: *We recommend...*

www.cyclehelmets.org Bicycle Helmet Research body
CTC Briefings *Cycle Helmets* and *Cycling and Road Safety* at ctc.org.uk/campaigns : *resources* : *briefings*.

Note: Spokes is not involved in **Sport**, and can't comment on helmets for sport cycling. See the CTC briefing instead.