



## **Play it Safe! Wear a Helmet Every Time You Ride!**

As parents, we want our children to be physically active. Physically active children are more likely to maintain a health body weight. But as children become more active, they will need safety gear that protects their bodies, including their heads. Bicycling is the most common activity when children use their "heads". In fact, more than 70% of all children ages 5 to 14 ride a bike. The bad news is that head injuries account for more than 60 percent of bicycle related deaths. But the good news is that wearing a helmet reduces the risk of head injury and *greatly* reduces the risk of death from a bicycle related head injury.

If safety is not enough of a reason to get our children to wear helmets, then maybe the strong-arm of the law will help do the trick. California law requires that anyone under 18 years of age wear a properly *fitted* and *fastened* helmet while operating or riding as a passenger on a non-motorized scooter, skateboard, or bicycle, and while wearing in-line or roller skates. Police in San Diego County can and will ticket children they see riding a bike without wearing a helmet. The result is a ticket that we, the parents, pay! And even though as parents we may not be required to wear helmets, we can always be "helmet-head role models" by wearing our helmets every time we ride.

Helmets *do* help to protect children while they are riding their bikes, skateboards, etc, but only work if they are worn *correctly*. A good fit every time is just as important as wearing a helmet every time we and our children ride. Here are a few basics to know when purchasing and fitting a helmet:

- First, before going to the store to purchase a helmet for your child, be sure to measure his/her head so that you know which helmet is the correct size to buy;
- Second, when fitting the helmet on your child, be sure that the helmet sits evenly and low on the forehead with only about 1-2 finger widths of room above the eyebrows. The helmet should touch your child's head all the way around;
- Third, the side straps should form a "Y" just below each ear and the chin strap should be comfortably snug under the chin; and
- Last, test the fit of the helmet by having your child shake his/her head and by pushing up on the front of the helmet. The helmet should stay in place. *Now, your child is ready to ride!*

Helmets are inexpensive and definitely cheaper than a trip to the emergency room! Remember, prevention is best so wear a helmet every time you and your children ride!!

(Sources for this article include the *National Highway Traffic Safety Administration* and *Safe Kids USA*)