



CYCLING FACT SHEET No. 49

Choosing and using a bicycle helmet

It is mandatory to wear a bicycle helmet, with the retention straps fastened, while riding on roads or paths, and also highly recommended when using mountain bike trails. This rule applies not only to the rider, but also to children sitting on a carrier seat or being towed in a trailer.

Because helmets are a necessary piece of equipment, plenty of time should be taken to find the most appropriate style and fit. Look for a model that meets Australian Standard 2063, is lightweight and has plenty of ventilation holes to allow airflow.

Head shape and size differ greatly so try a number of styles, brands etc, and choose a helmet with an internal shape that closely matches your dimensions.

Don't rely on the adhesive pads to take up the slack – they should only be used to achieve a fractional fit. Try the helmet first without the pads, using your index finger to check the gap between your head and the polystyrene foam interior. If it fits easily, the gap is probably too great – a well-fitting helmet should not move on the head when pushed. If there is a gap that varies from front to side, it indicates a mismatch between the helmet and your head shape.

Once you have chosen your helmet, don't wear it resting too high on the forehead. As a guide, the front rim should be about the width of two fingers above the eyebrows. Getting the right strap position takes practice – the side toggles on the straps should be adjusted so that they sit just under the ears.

During the warmer months, women in particular are concerned about getting so-called "helmet hair", caused by the shell compressing their locks.

The Bikewest fact sheet entitled "It's easy to cycle in style" provides some excellent tips for avoiding helmet hair.

A bicycle helmet should be replaced every five years or so because the foam can deteriorate over time. It is also wise to replace a helmet that has received an impact because the foam may have been weakened.



Helmet wearing exemption

A cyclist can apply for an exemption from wearing a helmet on medical grounds. To obtain this exemption, the cyclist must first write to the Occupational Health Physician, C/- Department of Transport, GPO Box R1290 Perth 6844 giving their full name, date of birth and address, and requesting that an application form be sent to them. Upon receipt of the application form, the cyclist must have it completed by a medical practitioner, then returned to the Department from where it will be sent to an Occupational Health Physician for approval. If approval is granted, the cyclist will receive written confirmation and this must be kept on hand at all times while riding.

This fact sheet is one of a series dealing with the use of bicycles for recreation and transport in Western Australia. The series looks at a range of cycling-related topics including ride routes, touring tips, maintenance, safety, road rules, insurance and product reviews. You can find more cycling fact sheets online at www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling

Bikewest
Department of Transport
441 Murray Street, Perth WA 6000
Tel: (08) 9216 8000
Fax: (08) 9216 8497
Email: cycling@transport.wa.gov.au