

Scooters and safety

It is important for parents to understand the dangers associated with the use of scooters (also known as a foot or kick scooter) and to take steps to protect their child from injury or death. Scooter riders are required by law to wear an approved bicycle helmet.

It is also important to teach children the road safety rules. Falls and collisions with cars and pedestrians are disturbingly common, with two out of three injuries involving children under 14 years of age. Young children and those learning to use the scooter are most at risk of injury.

According to child safety experts, a scooter is an inappropriate toy for any child under eight years of age. This toy is typically lightweight and may be motorised, which means it can travel at fast speeds. Parents should supervise their child and ensure that safety equipment is used at all times.

Riders need a safety helmet and guards for the wrists, elbows and knees. Scooters must have brakes and a bell or horn, and if used at night, proper lighting (which can be flashing or steady) – a white light at the front, a red light at the back and a red reflector on the back.

Scooter design

Scooters have small wheels, around 10cm or so. The braking system is not always reliable because the brake can't grip enough surface area on a small wheel and brakes become less effective with age. This, coupled with the low clearance of scooters, means that losing control is quite likely, particularly when riding over rough surfaces such as cobblestones or large cracks in the pavement.

Cheaper scooters may have dangerous design flaws, such as flimsy folding mechanisms that may give way under pressure or sharp edges that increase the risk of injury. Avoid cheaply made scooters and choose a design that matches your child's weight, motor skills and physical development.

There is currently no Australian Standard for kick scooters.

Common injuries

Falls are the most common cause of injury for Australian children riding scooters. Collisions with cars and pedestrians have also been reported. Common injuries include:

- Cuts
- Abrasions
- Bone fractures, particularly of the wrist
- Head injuries.

Head injuries

The brain doesn't fill the skull cavity completely. It is suspended in a chemical soup called cerebrospinal fluid, which nourishes the brain and serves as a shock absorber. If a child falls from a fast-moving scooter and hits a hard surface, such as the road, the brain is thrown against the inside of the skull. This causes bruising and swelling of the delicate tissues. Skull fractures and bleeding from sheared vessels around and inside the brain are also possible. Research suggests that safety helmets reduce the risk of head injury by up to 90 per cent.

Safety equipment

The essential safety equipment for riding a scooter includes:

- Bicycle helmet
- Wrist guards
- Elbow guards
- Knee guards.

Bicycle helmets

Helmets became compulsory safety equipment for bicyclists and scooter riders in 1990. The approved bicycle helmet must be securely fitted and fastened on the rider's head. According to Victoria's road safety authority (VicRoads), helmets have resulted in a 70 per cent decrease in the number of cyclists injured or killed by head injury.

Helmets are made of foam – similar to the foam used for portable coolers like Esky's – that absorbs the impact of a fall or blow. Look for the Australian Standards mark when choosing a bicycle helmet. The different types of helmet include:

- **Foam only** – the foam is covered in fabric
- **Micro shell** – the foam is covered in thin plastic
- **Hard shell** – the foam is covered in hard plastic.

Helmet safety suggestions

Safety suggestions include:

- Make sure the helmet fits the child's head comfortably before buying it.
- The helmet should sit just above the eyebrows.
- A correctly fitted helmet can't be moved around on the head, either forwards and backwards or sideways.
- The chinstrap must always be fastened firmly and never twisted.
- Impediments like ponytails and hair clips should not be worn.
- Always replace helmets after an impact or accident, or if the materials split or deteriorate.
- Clean the helmet according to the manufacturer's instructions, as some cleaning products may cause damage.

Wrist, elbow and knee guards

Wrist fractures are particularly common, since falling children will instinctively put out their hand or hands to save themselves. Wrist, elbow and knee guards are designed to bolster and protect these vulnerable joints.

Road safety

Road safety suggestions include:

- Provide a safe learning area while your child masters riding the scooter.
- Make sure your child wears their safety equipment every time they ride their scooter, even in the backyard.
- Supervise your child when they are riding their scooter.
- Don't ever allow a young child to ride their scooter near the road.
- Don't allow an older child to ride their scooter near the road until they are proficient at riding.
- Make sure your child understands and abides by road rules.
- Make sure your child is visible to drivers by dressing them in brightly coloured clothes.
- Warn your child of the potential dangers.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Kidsafe Tel. (03) 9251 7725

- VicRoads Tel. 13 11 71

Things to remember

- Scooters are popular with young people.
- Falls and collisions with cars and pedestrians are disturbingly common.
- Essential safety equipment includes a bicycle helmet and guards for the wrists, elbows and knees.
- Parents should supervise their children and make them aware of the potential hazards.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Kidsafe Victoria

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