

## Helmets

### Cycling Scotland position

Cycling Scotland is neither anti- nor pro-helmet use and believes that ultimately each individual adult should be free to decide whether to wear a helmet or not whilst cycling.

Cycling Scotland supports an individual's right to choose whether to wear a helmet but remain strongly opposed to any move toward helmet compulsion. We believe that any such measures may negatively impact on the uptake of cycling as part of a healthy, active and sustainable lifestyle.

### Key messages

- Wearing a helmet when cycling in the UK is not required by law.
- Cycle helmets should not be made compulsory now or at any time. It would be arbitrary to impose legislation on people who cycle, who do not face clearly higher risks than pedestrians or drivers. Enforced helmet laws drive cycle use down, thereby increasing the risk per person cycling and harming public health. Enforced helmet laws have not affected material prevention of serious head injury at the population level.
- Cycling is a low-risk activity and a safe mode of transport. Car users account for more than two thirds of road casualties, while people cycling account for just over 4% of casualties. This is in the context of rising cycle traffic. Over the last decade, there has been a 41% increase in pedal cycle traffic<sup>1</sup>.
- Cycling is not a leading cause of head injury in any group.

### Key Evidence

There are several arguments in research for and against the use of helmets.

- **The health benefits of cycling outweigh the risks** - cycling is a hugely beneficial activity for health. People who cycle regularly have a fitness level equivalent to an individual 10 years younger than them. As has been discussed, cycling is a low-risk activity. Research shows that enforcing cycle helmet use typically leads to a reduction in cycling by as much as a third, and will lead to a net increase in early deaths. The UK government has produced research which estimates that the health benefits of cycling outweigh the risks by a ratio of 20:1<sup>2</sup>.
- **Risk compensation** - this suggests that people cycling will cycle less cautiously when they are wearing a helmet.
- **Impact on social exclusion** - it has been suggested that certain groups are less likely to wear cycle helmets and therefore may be deterred further from cycling if compulsory helmet legislation was introduced. These groups include children from socially deprived areas, minority ethnic groups, and women.
- Evidence from a range of countries shows **no positive association between cycle helmet use being mandatory and a reduction in accidents**. For example, in New Zealand, helmet use became compulsory in 1994, and has increased from 40% to 90%, yet there has been no associated reduction in head injuries. In Portugal, following strong public opposition, the introduction of mandatory cycle helmets was dropped. Portugal has had the largest drop in road deaths in Europe between 2010 and 2015, and cycling deaths also fell by some 44%, while at the same time rates of cycling have increased markedly<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Transport Scotland (2017) Key Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2016  
<https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/39307/sct05174402361.pdf>, page 14

<sup>2</sup> Cycling UK (2016) Cycle Helmets: An overview of the evidence  
[http://www.cyclinguk.org/sites/default/files/file\\_public/helmets-evidencebrf.pdf](http://www.cyclinguk.org/sites/default/files/file_public/helmets-evidencebrf.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://ecf.com/news-and-events/news/important-victory-bicycle-users-portugal>