

# Takin' Safety to the Streets

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*Free Bike Helmets Available at Annual Family Safety Fest May 2*



ALTON - Safety and fun are the focus of Alton Memorial Hospital's ninth annual Family Safety Fest, to be held **Saturday, May 2, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.** on the hospital's rear parking lot (between the three Medical Office Buildings).

Close to 500 people attended last year on a beautiful spring day, and almost 300 bike helmets were given out to children free of charge. Additional informational tables are being added each year to better serve the whole family in areas such as substance abuse prevention, chronic conditions, health literacy, dental care and mental health.

The bike helmets are available to pre-registered children ages 4 through the end of elementary school, with helmets from the Helmets First organization led by Dr. Joseph Cangas, a pediatrician from Columbia, Ill. Helmet supplies are limited, so **appointments must be made in advance by calling 1-800-392-0936**. All adults and children attending the fair, even if they're not registering for a helmet, must also sign up when calling the same number. Volunteers will also be on hand to make sure the helmets fit correctly.

Carefree bike riding is a rite of passage in childhood — if it's done safely. Among Illinois children age 5 to 14 who were admitted to emergency rooms for bike injuries last year, 40 percent had injuries to their head or neck.

That's why wearing helmets while riding a bicycle is so important, says Dr. Cangas, who started the non-profit Helmets First organization along with a website to promote bike safety ([www.helmetsfirst.com](http://www.helmetsfirst.com)).

“As a pediatrician, I've seen everything from scalp lacerations requiring staples to stays in the intensive care unit that have led to total devastation due to kids in bike accidents not wearing a helmet,” says Dr. Cangas, also known as the “Helmet Doctor.”

He says that children should never get on a bike, scooter, skateboard or skates without a helmet.

“As soon as kids are riding anything, they should put on a helmet, even if they're riding with parents or in pull carts,” Dr. Cangas says. “Even a spill on a tricycle can lead to a devastating injury. But 85 percent of all bicycle-related head injuries could be prevented by a helmet. I advise parents to put the bike on a hook and only take it down once the helmet is on.”



Other features of the Family Health Fest are scheduled to include:

- The Alton Fire Department Smokehouse.
- A free hot dog lunch served by the Bank of Edwardsville beginning at 11 a.m.
- A highly entertaining self-defense demonstration by Piasa Martial Arts of Alton at noon.
- A Mobile Intensive Care Unit from Children's Hospital in St. Louis.
- A rock climbing wall.

In case of rain, the event would be moved inside to the hospital's Beeby Wing lobby and the cafeteria. Some attractions, such as the AFD smokehouse, would have to be canceled, but most other events, including the helmet giveaway, could be done indoors.

