



Bike Helmets Vital to Safe Summer Fun

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ALTON, IL -- 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. Joseph Cangas, a pediatrician from Columbia, Ill. who started the non-profit Helmets First organization along with a website to promote bike safety (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.”

Dr. Cangas will be providing the helmets that will be given out free to children ages 4-12 with an appointment at Alton Memorial Hospital's Family Safety Fest on Saturday, May 21.

Bike Helmet Tips from the Helmet Doctor

- Expensive doesn't mean better. A \$4 helmet can be as safe as a \$100 helmet.

- Check the inside of the helmet for a label that states the helmet is CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) certified.
- Make sure the fit is snug so the helmet doesn't wiggle.
- The helmet should be flat/level on your head, not tilted. Adjust the chin strap accordingly. Straps should form a "V" under the ears.
- Follow the two-finger rules. Make sure the helmet is two fingers above the eyebrows so it covers the forehead but not your eyes. Also, make sure no more than two fingers can fit under the chin strap when the helmet is on.
- Don't buy a used bike helmet. It may be too old to provide protection or may have been in a crash so it could be damaged inside.
- Adults should lead by example. Studies show more children wear a helmet if their parents do, too.

Dr. Joseph Cangas of Columbia, Ill., will provide helmets for children ages 4-12 at Alton Memorial Hospital's Family Safety Fest on Saturday, May 21, through his Helmets First Foundation. Appointments are necessary for the helmets and fitting, and should be made by call 800-392-0936.