

# NORTH CAROLINA BICYCLE HELMET LAW

## Summary

Governor Michael Easley signed the "Child Bicycle Safety Act" into law on July 5, 2001. The purpose of this law is to reduce the number of head-related injuries and deaths from bicycle crashes. Studies show that helmets prevent 60 percent of head injury deaths and reduce the overall risk of head injuries by 85 percent.

The basic provisions of the NC Bicycle Helmet Law are as follow:

- Every person under 16 years old must wear an approved bicycle helmet when operating a bicycle on any public road, public bicycle path, or other public right-of-way.
- All child passengers falling at or below 40 pounds/40 inches, must be carried in a separate restraining seat.
- Any parent or legal guardian who knowingly allows a child to ride without a helmet or to ride as a passenger not secured in a restraining seat (when applicable), will be in violation of the law.
- Violation of the law carries a \$10 civil fine. The fine may be waived upon the receipt of satisfactory proof of purchase of helmet or restraining seat.

This law went into effect October 1, 2001.

## Text of the NC Bicycle Helmet Law:

### AN ACT TO REQUIRE THE USE OF CERTAIN SAFETY EQUIPMENT BY CHILDREN WHILE THEY ARE BICYCLE OPERATORS OR PASSENGERS

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Chapter 20 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new Part 10B to Article 3 to read:

10B. Child Bicycle Safety Act.

20-171.6. Short title.

This Article shall be known and may be cited as the 'Child Bicycle Safety Act'.

20-171.7. Legislative findings and purpose.

(a) - The General Assembly finds and declares that:

1.(1) - Disability and death of children resulting from injuries sustained in bicycling accidents are a serious threat to the public health, welfare, and safety of the people of this State, and the prevention of that disability and death is a goal of all North Carolinians.

(2) - Head injuries are the leading cause of disability and death from bicycling accidents.

(3) - The risk of head injury from bicycling accidents is significantly reduced for bicyclists who wear proper protective bicycle helmets; yet helmets are worn by fewer than five percent (5%) of child bicyclists nationwide.

(4) - The risk of head injury or of any other injury to a small child who is a passenger on a bicycle operated by another person would be significantly reduced if any child passenger sat in a separate restraining seat.

(b) - The purpose of this Article is to reduce the incidence of disability and death resulting from injuries incurred in bicycling accidents by requiring that while riding on a bicycle on the public roads, public bicycle paths, and other public rights-of-way of this State, all bicycle operators and passengers under the age of 16 years wear approved protective bicycle helmets; that all bicycle passengers who weigh less than 40 pounds or are less than 40 inches in height be seated in separate restraining seats; and that no person who is unable to maintain an erect, seated position shall be a passenger in a bicycle restraining seat, and all other bicycle passengers shall be seated on saddle seats.

## 20-171.8. Definitions.

As used in this Article, the following terms have the following meanings:

1. (1) - 'Bicycle' means a human-powered vehicle with two wheels in tandem designed to transport, by the action of pedaling, one or more persons seated on one or more saddle seats on its frame. This term also includes a human-powered vehicle, designed to transport by the action of pedaling which has more than two wheels where the vehicle is used on a public roadway, public bicycle path, or other public right-of-way, but does not include a tricycle.
- (2) - 'Operator' means a person who travels on a bicycle seated on a saddle seat from which that person is intended to and can pedal the bicycle.
- (3) - 'Other public right-of-way' means any right-of-way other than a public roadway or public bicycle path that is under the jurisdiction and control of this State or a local political subdivision of the State and is designed for use and used by vehicular and/or pedestrian traffic.
- (4) - 'Passenger' means a person who travels on a bicycle in any manner except as an operator.
- (5) - 'Protective bicycle helmet' means a piece of headgear that meets or exceeds the impact standards for protective bicycle helmets set by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or the Snell Memorial Foundation.
- (6) - 'Public bicycle path' means a right-of-way under the jurisdiction and control of this State or a local political subdivision of the State for use primarily by bicycles and pedestrians.
- (7) - 'Public roadway' means a right-of-way under the jurisdiction and control of this State or a local political subdivision of the State for use primarily by motor vehicles.
- (8) - 'Restraining seat' means a seat separate from the saddle seat of the operator of the bicycle that is fastened securely to the frame of the bicycle and is adequately equipped to restrain the passenger in such seat and protect such passenger from the moving parts of the bicycle.
- (9) - 'Tricycle' means a three-wheeled, human-powered vehicle designed for use as a toy by a single child under the age of six years, the seat of which is no more than two feet from ground level.

## 20-171.9. Requirements for helmet and restraining seat use.

With regard to any bicycle used on a public roadway, public bicycle path, or other public right-of-way:

- (a) - It shall be unlawful for any parent or legal guardian of a person below the age of 16 to knowingly permit that person to operate or be a passenger on a bicycle unless at all times when the person is so engaged he or she wears a protective bicycle helmet of good fit fastened securely upon the head with the straps of the helmet.
- (b) - It shall be unlawful for any parent or legal guardian of a person below the age of 16 to knowingly permit that person to be a passenger on a bicycle unless all of the following conditions are met:
  1. (1) - The person is able to maintain an erect, seated position on the bicycle.
  - (2) - Except as provided in subdivision (3) of this subsection, the person is properly seated alone on a saddle seat (as on a tandem bicycle).
  - (3) - With respect to any person who weighs less than 40 pounds, or is less than 40 inches in height, the person can be and is properly seated in and adequately secured to a restraining seat.
- (c) - No negligence or liability shall be assessed on or imputed to any party on account of a violation of subsection (a) or (b) of this section.
- (d) - Violation of this section shall be an infraction. Except as provided in subsection (e) of this section, any parent or guardian found responsible for violation of this section may be ordered to pay a civil fine of up to ten dollars (\$10.00), inclusive of all penalty assessments and court costs.
- (e) - In the case of a first conviction of this section, the court may waive the fine upon receipt of satisfactory proof that the person responsible for the infraction has purchased or otherwise obtained, as appropriate, a protective bicycle helmet or a restraining seat, and uses and intends to use it whenever required under this section.

SECTION 2. This act becomes effective October 1, 2001.