

SUMMERTIME ALERT: Watch for Kids on the Roads

by Beth Stambaugh

School's almost out and that means more kids riding bikes, skateboards and scooters. While safety is always important, extra vigilance during the summer months can make a positive difference.

Each year in the United States, approximately 500,000 people are treated in emergency departments for injuries related to bicycle riding, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Children are more likely than adults to die of head injuries caused by motor vehicle collisions.

"Summer is known as 'trauma season' among emergency room physicians because of the dramatic increase in the number of child injuries May through August," said Cynthia Dennis, RN, Safe Kids Northeast Florida coordinator.

As summer nears, it's important for parents to teach kids the rules of the road, such as crossing only at crosswalks, riding on the right side of the road, and using the proper hand signals. Dennis suggests kids make eye contact with drivers to acknowledge they see kids on their bikes.

"Children can be impulsive and impatient," cautions Dennis. "As adults, we need to be extra alert and put the cell phone down while driving." Conversely, Dennis said kids should be aware of drivers at all times, even in peaceful neighborhoods, where accidents seem unlikely.

"Some of the deadliest accidents happen at very low speeds in neighborhoods," said Katherine Considine, M.D., medical director

of St. Luke's Hospital's Emergency Department. "Kids should stop at all cross streets and look for cars backing out of driveways."

Because head injuries are the leading cause of death and injury in bike-related accidents, Dr. Considine stressed the importance of wearing helmets and other protective gear, like wristbands and kneepads, when skating.

Many kids do not wear helmets properly. "A helmet should fit comfortably and not too tightly, with straps fastened," said Scott Summey, co-owner of Open Road Bicycles. "If you fall and your helmet hits the ground, get a new one -- \$35 is cheap insurance." Open Road Bicycles, along with other local bike shops, will adjust kids' and adults' bike helmets for free. Before you buy a helmet, make sure it is certified by the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC).

Making sure your kids' bikes are well maintained will help keep them safer. "Air pressure, oil and cleanliness are the three main things to remember," said Summey. Now is a good time to get your bike tuned up at a bike shop. Most shops will also perform free safety inspections.

Bike fit is also a factor. "The bike needs to be adjusted to fit the child," said Drew Johnson, owner of City Cycle in Riverside. "Make sure the child can reach the handlebars and brake levers and that he or she can easily touch the ground on both sides while on the seat," he said. "And most bikes are not designed for more than one rider, so

don't let your kids double up."

Being a good role model for your kids will go a long way. "Children are more likely to follow safety rules when they see their parents doing so," said Dennis. So strap on that helmet and follow all the rules of the road.

RULES OF THE ROAD

- Always ride on the right side of the road with traffic.
- Wear a helmet. For kids 16 and under, it's the law.
- Cross only at crosswalks.
- Know the proper hand signals and use them.
- Obey traffic signals and stop signs.
- Stop before riding out into traffic. Make sure there is no oncoming traffic before entering the road. Look left, right, and then left.
- Look back and yield to traffic before turning left at intersections.
- Walk your bike across busy intersections.
- Don't wear headphones or headsets while cycling.

To schedule a free helmet safety inspection, contact Safe Kids Northeast Florida at (904) 202-4302.



Tai Tai Sherrer of San Marco

Students learn bike safety

Fourth and fifth-grade students from Riverside Presbyterian Day School participated in the RPDS Bicycle Safety Unit this spring. The lesson was just in time for summer fun, when scores of children will be unleashed onto the neighborhood streets.

The two-week unit was designed to promote helmet safety and awareness, knowledge of bicycles, proper attire for riding and precautions to take before and while riding their bicycle. The coaches also performed an experiment to show the possible outcomes of riding with and without a helmet — using the famous Mr. Melon. During the second week, the focus shifted to developing riding skills and putting these skills to real use with several neighborhood rides