

NO HELMET? THINK TWICE

With five children, ages 5 to 13, Alison Reynolds has buckled her share of bike helmets. But as the Sacramento resident watches her sixth-grader ride through the park bare-headed, she admits she has relaxed her approach with her older children.

“If I make them wear helmets, they end up taking them off once they’re down the block,” she says with a sigh. “My husband isn’t helpful either. He says that we never wore helmets when we were kids.”

And so it goes. In the name of choosing one’s battles, many parents have decided to let helmet usage slide, despite a California law requiring helmets for all those younger than 18 riding bicycles, scooters, roller blades and skateboards. That’s especially true of older children, yet they are the ones far more likely to be seriously injured in a bike accident and less likely to be wearing a helmet, according to California Highway Patrol and emergency room statistics.

Consider that the local Level One Trauma Center at UC Davis Medical Center treated 34 children younger than 14 for traumatic bicycle-related injuries this past year. Of those, 27 were ages 9 or older and only seven of these older children were wearing helmets.

Roxanne Woods, R.N., of the UC Davis Trauma Prevention Program, says speed is the most common factor in serious bike accidents. That’s why older children, who are more competent but also more reckless, are more likely to be injured.

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“If you’re going over 5 or 10 mph, you will be ejected from your bike in an accident. And the heaviest part of your body will go down first: your head, neck and chest,” she says.



Shannon Price, Community Service Officer for the Sacramento Police Department, says parents need to remain vigilant about making sure their children wear helmets. They should teach their children the law (violators can be sent to court and receive a \$25 fine); let their kids choose a helmet that is safe but also attractive; and model good safety behavior by wearing helmets themselves. “You can’t expect your children to wear a helmet if you don’t,” he says.

—*Esther Chapman*