

Bicycle Safety Tips



With the beautiful weather that we have here in the Florida panhandle, there is no time like today to dust off the old bike in the garage. Unless you live in a quiet neighborhood or on a country road, your only choice is to ride in and around traffic. For many, riding a bicycle on public roads can be very intimidating. With the addition of heavy vehicles moving at high speeds, cyclists sometimes make less than wise decisions based on fear or misinformation. Here are some tips to clear up some misconceptions and prepare you for a safe and enjoyable ride.

- Keep in mind that, as a cyclist riding on the streets, you are governed by the same laws as motorists. With that being said, think of how you drive your vehicle. Would you blow through stop signs or try to squeeze your car around the side of other cars to move to the front at traffic signals? Would you go to the left of a solid yellow line to pass another vehicle? If you would not do this in your car, please do not consider doing it on your bike. Any of these actions put you at risk, anger drivers, and simply give cyclists a bad reputation.
- It is much safer to ride with traffic than against it. Some people may think, “If I walk and run against traffic, I should do the same on a bike,” or, “If someone is going to hit me, I can get out of the way.” However, there are dangerous consequences that can come from riding against traffic. The largest problem with this concept is that on narrow roads, like a canopy/county road, traffic has limited room to pass cyclists. With you coming toward a car, it poses a challenging situation for you and the driver if there is oncoming traffic. If you are going the same direction as traffic, the driver is able to slow down to the speed that you are traveling at until the oncoming traffic has passed and then safely pass you.
- Do not ride on the sidewalk. While riding your bike on the sidewalk is not against the law in Florida, there are stipulations put in place by the local government. For example, in Tallahassee, if there is a bicycle lane provided, cyclists must ride in the designated bicycle lane instead of the sidewalk. This is likely because it is generally unwise and less safe to ride on the sidewalk than the road. If there is no bicycle lane, and you choose to ride on the sidewalk, keep in mind that pedestrians legally have the right-of-way. You would be at fault for an accident occurring between you, as a bicyclist, and a pedestrian on the sidewalk. While riding on a sidewalk, you are under the same laws as a pedestrian. Florida law dictates that while riding a bicycle on a sidewalk, bicyclists should give pedestrians an audible signal before overtaking and passing them. Also, the faster you ride, the more unsafe riding on a sidewalk becomes for the bicyclist, pedestrian, and potentially the motorist. With increased speeds and often limited sight visibility due to trees or other objects, you put yourself and others at increased risk. Many sidewalks are not designed for higher speed traffic and can often be riddled with large cracks or tight turns which could be hazardous. It is generally much safer for all involved to ride on the road.
- Wear the right gear. All bicycles used after dark must have a white front light that can be seen from at least five hundred feet and a rear light and reflector that emit a red light which can be seen from at least six hundred feet. Wear reflective clothing or additional lights and reflectors for extra precaution. Also, Florida law only mandates cyclists sixteen years old and under wear helmets. However, all bicyclists should wear them. Helmets greatly reduce the risk of injury should an accident occur. They reduce the risk of traumatic brain injury by half, facial fractures by approximately thirty percent, and death by over forty percent.

Keep these guidelines in mind for a safe ride. Cover some distance while safely taking in blooming flowers and amazing scenery. Adhering to bicycle safety laws will help decrease your risk of incidents, and if you doubt any road or situation, it is usually best to follow your gut instincts and err on the side of safety. Ultimately, I hope you go out and enjoy all that riding has to offer! 🌳

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