

KNOWING THE RULES OF THE ROAD AND HAVING THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT WILL HELP YOUNG CYCLISTS ENJOY BIKE TOUR

Get ready to ride, mini-marathoners

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THE GAZETTE

On May 30 at 9:15 a.m., an estimated 6,000 bicyclists ranging in age from 6 to 12 years old will set out from Jarry Park to wind their way through 22 kilometres of Montreal streets as part of the annual Tour de l'Île des Enfants bike marathon.

That's a lot of children on a lot of bikes. But a team of 1,500 volunteers will line the route to offer help and advice where needed. They'll also help children and parents meet at a designated spot at the end of the marathon. The planned ratio of volunteer to child is 1:4.

The route will be closed to motor vehicles and the area will be secured by members of the Montreal police department.

A medical team will be on-site for emergencies and there are vehicles to transport children who can't or don't want to finish the route.

"We've done the (children's marathon) for 12 years and there has never been a problem," organizer Patrick Howe said. "We encourage the younger (6- and 7-year-old) children to come with friends or an older sibling so they are not alone. It's rare to see a 6-year-old doing the (marathon) alone."

Children can stop half-way at a rest stop to drink and use the bathroom. It takes the faster riders about one hour to finish the circuit and the slower riders about two.

What can parents do to prepare their children for the challenge?

"The thing to remember is that you can't just put a child on a bike and let (him or her) go," Debbie Friedman said.

Friedman is the head of the Pediatric and Adolescent Trauma Program at the Montreal Children's Hospital.

"Every summer our emergency treats around 500 bike-related injuries," Friedman said. "Most of the injuries could have been prevented."

Learning the rules of the road and wearing the right equipment and the right attitude can help. Friedman said wearing a helmet can reduce the severity of injuries by 88 per cent.

"We've seen children walk into emergency with a helmet cracked in two but without an injury," Friedman said. "But children must also be aware that wearing a helmet does not give them license to go wild on a bike."

"It's frustrating to hear parents say 'I didn't (take all these precautions) and I survived,' Friedman said. "It's the responsibility of the parent to be a good role model when a child says 'I like to feel the wind in my hair' or 'it's not cool to wear a helmet.'"

Friedman offers the following recommendations for bike safety:



A lot of children take part in the tour, but there are plenty of volunteers, too. FROM GAZETTE FILES

1. Make sure the helmet carries a stamp of approval from a regulatory board.
2. The helmet should be snug fitting and rest squarely on the head.
3. Keep the helmet strap snugly attached at all times.
4. Do not use a helmet that has been involved in an accident. There might be hidden structural damage.
5. Make sure brakes and wheels are in tip-top shape and that the seat is adjusted to a height that allows the child - with legs extended - to touch the ground with his or her toes.
6. Talk to your child about how many other children are expected to participate in the marathon and explain that it is extra important to be aware of what is going on around him or her (which is not a natural instinct for children younger than 10). If the bike has a bell, encourage your child to use it as a warning, not as a noisemaker.
7. No clowning around. Ride with both hands on the handlebars. A marathon is a fun challenge, but should be approached seriously.
8. Apply sunscreen.
9. Make sure the child drinks water or a sports drink to keep hydrated. Carbonated drinks don't do the job as well.

The Tour de l'Île des Enfants sets out from Jarry Park Sunday, May 30, at 9:15 a.m. Registration costs \$11. To register, call (514) 521-8687 or go to www.velo.qc.ca. The Tour de l'Île des Enfants and grownup events Operation Bike-to-Work, The Metropolitan Challenge (May 29), Tour la Nuit (June 4) and the 20th annual Tour de l'Île (June 6) are all part of the Montreal Bike Fest. To find out more, go to www.velo.qc.ca