



## Montreal Gazette opinion article: It's time for mandatory bike helmets

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Bike Helmet

**How many preventable head traumas and destroyed families will it take for the province to enact legislation?**

By DEBBIE FRIEDMAN, The Gazette August 16, 2011

**As director of trauma at the Montreal Children's Hospital and someone with 28 years of experience in pediatric and adolescent trauma care and injury prevention, I continue to be baffled by the resistance of cyclists to wearing helmets, and the reluctance of the government to pass legislation that would make helmets mandatory.**

Because I work in the field of trauma, it will come as no surprise that I am a strong proponent of legislation making bicycle helmets mandatory for children, teens and adults. I wonder just how many preventable traumas and destroyed families it will take for that to happen.

According to the World Health Organization, prevention strategies should be developed through a combination of education, environmental measures and engineering modifications – and yes, in some cases, enforcement and legislation. Successful injury-prevention ventures often result from concurrent initiatives, none of which are mutually exclusive. Ensure streets and roads are well-maintained and safe for all users; improve bike paths; educate drivers and cyclists about the need to follow the rules – but also pass and enforce laws.

Anti-helmet advocates sabotage and undermine the importance of the Quebec government considering such legislation. I am someone who sees the devastation first-hand.

Each year the **Montreal Children's Hospital Trauma Centre** (<http://www.thechildren.com/trauma/>) treats more than 16,000 children who come in with a large variety and level of severity of traumatic injuries. At least 500 of these injuries are bicycle-related. As a trauma centre, we are continually faced with the challenge of finding effective ways to convey the important message that activity and fun must be balanced with safety.

I know that legislation is not always the most well-received and effective strategy. But sometimes – and this is the case with a law on bicycle helmets – it is a necessary step. We have seen the benefits of seatbelt and child-carseat laws, speed limits and, more recently, four-sided fences around swimming pools. Making the use of helmets mandatory is a no-brainer.

Following legislation there will be an adjustment period, but people will adapt. It is irresponsible not to do what has to be done to prevent these deaths and traumatic, life-altering injuries.

**Quebec statistics show that head trauma occurs in approximately 35 per cent of injured cyclists, often as a result of a collision with a motor vehicle.**

**According to Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec, head injuries continue to be the main cause of death among cyclists. They account for 60 per cent of deaths and 30 per cent of serious injuries. Approximately 25 per cent of victims are age 15 or younger.**

But serious brain injuries to cyclists do not only occur as a result of collisions with a vehicle or travelling at high speeds. Head injuries also occur because of impact with obstacles, other cyclists and pedestrians and because of falling from the bicycle.

Yes, there are extreme cases involving speed where a helmet may not make a difference. But there are far more cases where wearing a helmet prevents or significantly reduces the impact of the trauma to the brain.

I will always remember the case of a child struck by a car while riding down a street near the hospital. The child's helmet was found at the scene. It was cracked in half, but the child walked away with a fractured collarbone and was brain-injury free.

It's time for the Quebec government to do the right thing and make wearing a helmet while cycling mandatory. It saves lives. It prevents injuries. Just do it!

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