

Don't forget the helmet if giving bicycle as gift

Bicycles are always a popular gift at Christmas time, and many parents are shopping now for that perfect new bicycle for their child – maybe even their first bicycle. This is an excellent opportunity to teach children about the importance of wearing a helmet to protect their head. According to National Safe Kids, helmets can reduce the risk of severe brain injury by up to 88%, but only 45% of children wear bike helmets. Safe Kids also reports that bicycles are associated with more injuries in children than any other product except automobiles. Other studies from the organization found that nearly half of the hospitalizations related to bicycles are from traumatic injury to the brain. Helmets should be considered an important part of bike riding.

“Learning to ride a bicycle is not just child’s play,” said Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service agent Lorrie Coop. “In addition to promoting healthy living habits, riding bicycles can teach children about becoming independent. With this new independence,

children need to learn to follow important safety rules. One of the most important rules is to always wear a helmet.”

Parents can be great role models to promote bicycle safety by wearing helmets on every trip. A child who rides with companions wearing helmets or adults in general is more likely to wear a helmet himself. Even very young toddlers on tricycles should wear helmets to establish good habits.

When selecting a helmet for your child, follow these tips:

- * Look for a helmet that has been certified to meet Consumer Product Safety Commission standards.

- * Make sure the helmet fits properly. To do this, measure around the rider’s head about an inch above his or her eyebrows, and select an appropriately sized helmet.

- * When wearing a helmet, make sure the rim sits level from front to back and is worn low and just above the eyebrows.

- * Make sure the helmet fits snugly. Adjust the helmet’s size with extra foam pads, which are provided with most helmets.

- * Buckle the chin strap on every ride.

- * Replace a helmet if it

has been in a crash, even if no damage is visible.

In addition to helmets, parents need to find safe places to ride, such as parks, sidewalks, or playgrounds. It is important to supervise preschoolers when they are riding, and keep children younger than 10 from riding bikes in the street.

When teaching children to ride bicycles, also educate them on these tips for safe bicycle riding:

- * Always wear a bike helmet.

- * Make sure the bicycle is the right size for the rider and in good working order.

- * Wear the proper clothing - neon, fluorescent, or other bright colors when riding day or night.

- * Teach children to make eye contact with drivers.

- * Ride in the same direction as other traffic.

- * Use hand and arm signals.

- * There should only be one rider per saddle.

- * Keep at least one hand on the handlebars.

- * The bicycle must have a white light on the front and a red reflector or red light on the rear (for riding at night).

- * Use effective brakes that are capable of making the braked wheel skid.