

Bicycle helmets prevent fatal head injuries

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Cyclists who died of a head injury were three times as likely to not be wearing a helmet compared with those who died of other injuries, according to a study in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

"We saw an association between dying as a result of sustaining head injury and not wearing a helmet," states Dr. Navindra Persaud, Keenan Research Centre and the Department of Family and Community Medicine, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, with coauthors. "These results are consistent with a protective effect of helmets on cycling deaths."

There is scant evidence on the relationship between helmet use and fatal head injuries.

Researchers looked at data from the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario on all 129 accidental cycling deaths between January 2006 and December 2010 in the province. Cyclist ages ranged from 10 to 83 years and 86% were boys or men. More than three quarters of the deaths (77%) involved a motor vehicle. The results are consistent with an approximate 3-fold increase in the risk of death from [head injuries](#) for people who do not wear helmets compared with those who do.

Cycling deaths account for more than 2% of [traffic fatalities](#), and every week in Canada a cyclist dies. Although there are regulations regarding helmet use, they vary across the country, and there is controversy over whether helmets prevent injury and death.

"While legislating helmet use is controversial and inconsistent in Canada, our study shows that wearing helmets saves lives," says Persaud.

"Policies and campaigns that promote helmet use may decrease cycling mortality."

More information: www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.120988

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