

Motorcycle and bicycle helmet use laws

April 2012

- Laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear a helmet are in place in 19 states and the District of Columbia
- Laws requiring only some motorcyclists to wear a helmet are in place in 28 states
- There is no motorcycle helmet use law in 3 states (Illinois, Iowa, and New Hampshire)
- Some bicyclists are required by law to wear a helmet in 21 states and the District of Columbia
- There is no bicycle helmet use law in 29 states

The history of motorcycle helmet laws in the United States is characterized by change. In 1967, to increase motorcycle helmet use, the federal government required the states to enact helmet use laws in order to qualify for certain federal safety programs and highway construction funds. The federal incentive worked. By the early 1970s, almost all the states had universal motorcycle helmet laws. Michigan was the first state to repeal its law in 1968, beginning a pattern of repeal, reenactment, and amendment of motorcycle helmet laws. In 1976, states successfully lobbied Congress to stop the Department of Transportation from assessing financial penalties on states without helmet laws.

No state has a universal bicycle helmet law. Only 21 states and the District of Columbia have statewide bicycle helmet laws, and they apply only to young riders (often riders younger than 16). Local ordinances in a few other states require bicycle helmets for some or all riders.

Low-power cycle is a generic term used by the Institute to cover motor-driven cycles, mopeds, scooters, and various other 2-wheeled cycles excluded from the motorcycle definition. While state laws vary, a cycle with an engine displacement of 50 cubic centimeters or less, brake horsepower of 2 or less, and top speeds of 30 mph or less typically is considered a low-power cycle. Twenty-two states have motorcycle helmet laws that cover all low-power cycles. Twenty-five states and the District of Columbia have laws that cover some low-power cycles.

- [Table](#)
- [Map: motorcyclists covered](#)
- [Map: low-power cycles covered](#)
- [Map: bicyclists covered](#)
- [Table: motorcycle helmet laws history](#)

State	Motorcycle helmet use governs:	Does the motorcycle helmet law cover all low-power cycles?	Bicycle helmet use governs:
Alabama	all riders	yes	15 and younger
Alaska	17 and younger ¹	yes	no law
Arizona	17 and younger	some	no law

Arkansas	20 and younger	yes	no law
California	all riders	yes	17 and younger
Colorado	17 and younger and passengers 17 and younger	yes	no law
Connecticut	17 and younger	yes	15 and younger
Delaware	18 and younger ²	some	17 and younger
District of Columbia	all riders	some	15 and younger
Florida	20 and younger ³	some	15 and younger
Georgia	all riders	some	15 and younger
Hawaii	17 and younger	some	15 and younger
Idaho	17 and younger	some	no law
Illinois	no law	no law	no law
Indiana	17 and younger	yes	no law
Iowa	no law	no law	no law
Kansas	17 and younger	some	no law
Kentucky	20 and younger ⁴	some	no law

Louisiana	all riders	yes	11 and younger
Maine	17 and younger ⁵	some	15 and younger
Maryland	all riders	some	15 and younger
Massachusetts	all riders	yes	1–16 (riding with children younger than 1 prohibited)
Michigan	20 and younger ⁶	some	no law
Minnesota	17 and younger ⁷	yes	no law
Mississippi	all riders	yes	no law
Missouri	all riders	some	no law
Montana	17 and younger	some	no law
Nebraska	all riders	yes	no law
Nevada	all riders	some	no law
New Hampshire	no law	no law	15 and younger
New Jersey	all riders	yes	16 and younger
New Mexico	17 and younger	some	17 and younger
New York	all riders	some	1–13 (riding with children younger than 1 prohibited)

North Carolina	all riders	yes	15 and younger
North Dakota	17 and younger ⁸	yes	no law
Ohio	17 and younger ⁹	yes	no law
Oklahoma	17 and younger	some	no law
Oregon	all riders	yes	15 and younger
Pennsylvania	20 and younger ¹⁰	some	11 and younger
Rhode Island	20 and younger ¹¹	some	15 and younger
South Carolina	20 and younger	yes	no law
South Dakota	17 and younger	yes	no law
Tennessee	all riders	yes	15 and younger
Texas	20 and younger ¹²	some	no law
Utah	17 and younger	yes	no law
Vermont	all riders	some	no law
Virginia	all riders	some	no law
Washington	all riders	yes	no law

West Virginia	all riders	some	14 and younger
Wisconsin	17 and younger ¹³	some	no law
Wyoming	17 and younger	some	no law

¹Alaska's motorcycle helmet use law covers passengers of all ages, operators younger than 18, and operators with instructional permits.

²In Delaware, every motorcycle operator or rider age 19 and older shall have in their possession a safety helmet approved by the Secretary.

³In Florida, the law requires that all riders younger than 21 years wear helmets, without exception. Those 21 years and older may ride without helmets only if they can show proof that they are covered by a medical insurance policy.

⁴In Kentucky, the law requires that all riders younger than 21 years wear helmets, without exception. Those 21 years and older may ride without helmets only if they can show proof that they are covered by a medical insurance policy. Motorcycle helmet laws in Kentucky also cover operators with instructional/learner's permits.

⁵Motorcycle helmet laws in Maine cover operators with instructional/learner's permits and operators in their first year of licensure. Maine's motorcycle helmet use law also covers passengers 17 years and younger and passengers if their operators are required to wear a helmet.

⁶In Michigan, the law requires that all riders younger than 21 years wear helmets, without exception. Those 21 years and older may ride without helmets only if they carry additional insurance and have passed a motorcycle safety course or have had their motorcycle endorsement for at least two years. Motorcycle passengers who want to exercise this option also must be 21 or older and carry additional insurance.

⁷Motorcycle helmet laws in Minnesota cover operators with instructional/learner's permits.

⁸North Dakota's motorcycle helmet use law covers all passengers traveling with operators who are covered by the law.

⁹Ohio's motorcycle helmet use law covers all operators during the first year of licensure and all passengers of operators who are covered by the law.

¹⁰Pennsylvania's motorcycle helmet use law covers all operators during the first two years of licensure unless the operator has completed the safety course approved by PennDOT or the Motorcycle Safety Foundation.

¹¹Rhode Island's motorcycle helmet use law covers all passengers (regardless of age) and all operators during the first year of licensure (regardless of age).

¹²Texas exempts riders 21 years or older if they can either show proof of successfully completing a motorcycle operator training and safety course or can show proof of having a medical insurance policy. A peace officer may not stop or detain a person who is the operator of or a passenger on a motorcycle for the sole purpose of determining whether the person has successfully completed the motorcycle operator training and safety course or is covered by a health insurance plan.

¹³Motorcycle helmet laws in Wisconsin cover operators with instructional/learner's permits.