

# Empowering Communities: Protecting Young Cyclists on California's Roads

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[San Jose and San Francisco](#) are among the most bicycle-friendly cities in the country, and although cyclists in rural areas may not have the same infrastructure, interest in bike-riding—both as a hobby and as transportation—is high in rural communities as well. Let's take a moment this National Bike Month to dig into the latest details about bikes in California and to highlight the importance of bike safety.

California comes in fourth in [The League of American Bicyclists' "2022 Bicycle Friendly States Report,"](#) and the number of Californians (and Americans) hopping on a bike is generally on the rise.

In fact, the pandemic caused a national "[bike boom](#)" as long-time cyclists and a surge of new ones navigated their bikes onto the less-crowded roadways. Unfortunately, this meant a [9 percent](#) increase in cyclist fatalities (938 in 2020) from the previous year (859 in 2019). At the same time, the demographics of cyclist fatalities and injuries is shifting; most significantly, child cyclist deaths have declined in recent years. In adults and children who crash or are struck while cycling, the [difference](#) between an injury and death is often a helmet, which can protect the wearer from fatal head injuries. Wearing a properly fitted helmet [reduces the risk of head injury by 85%](#), brain injury by 88%, and severe brain injury by 75%

Many efforts to educate about the importance of wearing a helmet, as well as efforts to distribute helmets to children, have been successful—as reflected in the lower child cyclist fatality data. One such program, delivered this spring by [Walk and Bike Mendocino](#) and sponsored by the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) using funds from CA Senate Bill 1, educated 4th and 5th grade students at Nokomis Elementary School in Ukiah, CA about the importance of wearing a helmet and other bike and pedestrian safety issues. Senate Bill 1 (SB1) is a legislative package investing \$5.4 billion annually to improve California's transportation infrastructure, transit, and safety. With help from MTI, Walk and Bike Mendocino distributed more than 50 helmets to students, who learned about local helmet laws, safe routes to schools, and riding their bikes while following the rules of the road.



This program incorporated an interactive portion in which staff set up three stations: 1) a cityscape with signs, and an intersection with an obstacle course where students demonstrated their knowledge of the rules of the road and proper bike handling skills; 2) a slow race where students demonstrated braking and balance; and 3) a relay station with slide bikes where students responded to questions about the rules of the road.

Nokomis Elementary teacher Charity Armstrong said of the program, "Many of our students had not been on a bicycle before. Your instruction gave them a vital piece of knowledge for living successfully in our community since we do not have a lot of other public transportation options here. These students will now have the skills needed to ride to play sports, attend after-school activities, and visit with their friends. With the helmets you donated to the students, the kids will be able to safely ride bikes to school and with their families."



The work being done by Walk and Bike Mendocino and others is critical to making cycling in California accessible and safe for everyone. Riding your bike has been shown to have substantial physical and mental health benefits for everyone. For example, [studies](#) of older adults have shown that riding a bike can provide opportunities for people to socialize and enjoy the outdoors as well as empower individuals to increase self-confidence and even recapture a sense of childhood joy. Get out there and ride!

