
Bicycle Helmet Laws

Jordan Medlock - March 27, 2015



Introduction

Albuquerque is home to a very vibrant bicycling community. The city has over 400 miles of bicycle paths and trails, in 2010 bicycling.com voted Albuquerque as the 17th most bike friendly city in the U.S.. Dedicated bike lanes and paths provide safe infrastructure for



bicyclists to commute through the city. There are three kinds of bike path in Albuquerque, the multiple use trail, the bicycle lane, and the bicycle route. The multiple use trail is a paved path that allows pedestrian and bicycle traffic but prohibits motor vehicles. The bicycle lane is a dedicated lane on the side of motorways. The bicycle route is a road that is shared by bicycles and motor vehicles.

Bicycling invariably causes many accidents in the city. The sides of roads are littered with “Ghost Bikes” which are a solemn reminder to the bicyclist who died there. Albuquerque has posted many safety rules and guidelines posted to help bicyclists, although these are merely suggestions and rarely enforced. The purpose of this report is to determine if the city of Albuquerque should create and enforce mandatory helmet laws.

Methods

To better understand this topic we need to first consider the research done in other cities to try to improve their bicycle safety.

1. Does wearing a helmet increase safety?
2. Do mandatory helmet laws increase helmet use?
3. Do mandatory helmet laws increase public wellbeing?

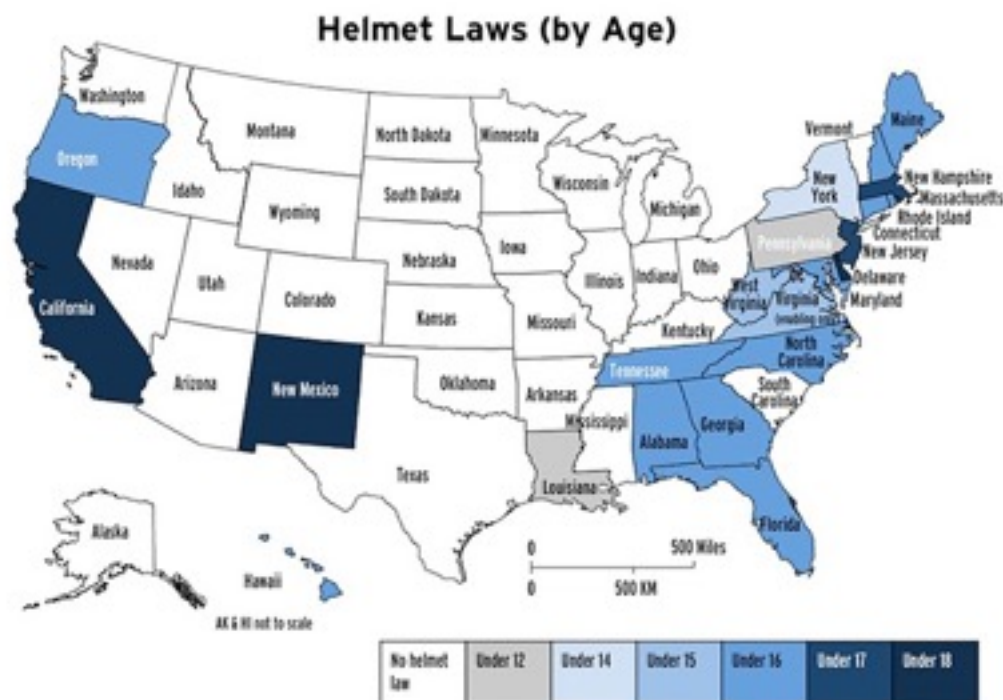
Results

1. Does wearing a helmet increase safety?

This may seem trivial as the American Medical Association has stated that “Helmet use is an effective public health intervention.” Although there is a surprising amount of research stating otherwise. One reason for so much opposition to the effectiveness of helmets is the theory of risk compensation that states that because people feel safer with a helmet on they tend to take more risks. An English study by Ian Walker showed that vehicles passed significantly closer to bicyclists wearing a helmet than bicyclists without. Another study showed that bicyclists will cycle faster when they aren't wearing helmets. A study performed by Rodgers showed that there is actually a correlation between wearing a helmet and the chance of injuries. There is no final scientific consensus on whether helmets increase safety.

2. Do mandatory helmet laws increase helmet use?

Many countries and states have created mandatory helmet laws. Australia mandated the use of a helmet when bicycling from 1990 to 1992. 21 U.S. states currently have helmet laws for children under 18. Guam is the only U.S. territory to make compulsory helmet laws for adults. Studies conducted in Australia showed a 40% increase in helmet use after the laws.



3. Do mandatory helmet laws increase public wellbeing?

Regular bicycling has been shown to be very beneficial for individuals health. The Australia census showed that there was a 30% decrease in bicycle usage after the mandatory helmet laws. Theoretically the decrease bicycle usage will make drivers less used to bicyclists and make not look out for them as much. This makes the people who are still bicycling will be less safe around drivers who aren't looking for bicyclists. Also people who aren't bicycling aren't as healthy. So, no mandatory helmet laws decrease public wellbeing.

Helmets are very important safety concerns when it comes to individual bicyclists. They have been shown numerous times to protect bicyclists brains in accidents. They have also shown that they will sometimes make the bicyclists less risk averse as well as making the drivers around less risk averse as well. Helmet laws do increase the use of helmets in the public. Although increasing the use helmets will make those wearing the helmets safer, it will also make people bike less and therefor be less healthy. The decreased amount of bicyclists on the streets will also make the ones left less safe by decreasing awareness. Bicycle laws have been very important for minors but for adults they have been implemented and quickly repealed because they don't have any proven benefits.

Discussion

Based on the research in this study I have concluded that mandatory helmet laws should not be implemented.

Mandatory helmet laws have seemed like a good idea in many places. But when the laws were created they turned out to be counterintuitively very bad for public heath. They decrease the number of bicyclists on the road.

Recommendations

My recommendation is to not create mandatory helmet laws but to instead increase public use of helmets through the use of a public service announcement urging bicyclists to use helmets, and obey the bicycle laws and safety tips. This will make individuals safer while keeping the number of bicyclists on the road.

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