

News Column – Donna Krug, Family & Consumer Science Agent and District Director, Cottonwood Extension District

May is Bike Month

As we turn the calendar to May I was reminded that Pilot Club members were going to join me in visiting each elementary school in Barton County. Pilot Club had bicycle helmets to present at every school as part of their brain injury awareness project. During our visit I would share the rules of riding a bicycle complete with hand signals and safe riding practices. I hope that since the school year was cut short that we will be able to make a visit to the schools next fall to share our message.

The beautiful spring weather we have had lately has been great for bicycling. I have bike commuted to the office for many years and try to run our close-to-home errands by bike whenever possible. It only takes five minutes longer to ride to work and there are several benefits. The health benefits of exercise and savings at the pump are the main ones that come to mind.

As you and your family members dust off your bicycles for another season, do not forget to purchase a helmet to wear when riding. More than 60 percent of deaths attributed to bicycle accidents are caused by head injuries. Safety experts suggest that as many as 75 percent of the bicycle related fatalities involving children could be prevented with a bicycle helmet.

Consider a helmet a necessity, rather than an extra. Without a helmet, riders who sustain an injury are 14 times more likely to become a fatality. Choose a helmet that is specifically designed for bicycling, rather than a multi-sports helmet. Choose one that meets or exceeds safety standards established by the U.S Consumer Product Safety Commission. Make sure the helmet fits, rather than one a child will grow into. Replace the helmet if an accident occurs or if the helmet is badly jarred or cracked.

While we are on the subject of safe bicycling, please remind the riders in your family of the following rules of the road:

- Ride with the traffic, rather than facing traffic.
- Use the bicycle lane or ride next to the curb.
- Obey traffic signals.
- Stay alert and keep your mind on your riding.

Many parents ask at what age a child is old enough to ride in the street rather than on the sidewalk. There is not a one-size-fits-all age. A child's maturity and riding ability are factors. Other factors to consider are the size of the community, traffic patterns and congestion, and whether it is a residential area or a business district. A smaller community can seem peaceful and safe, but may have periods when safety is compromised – for example, after a ball game, during a community festival, or at harvest time.

Last but not least, make sure that you perform periodic bicycle maintenance on the families' bikes. Checking tire pressure and condition, lubricating key places, checking brakes, pedals, lights or reflectors is also recommended.

I hope you will celebrate National Bike Month by riding as much as you can!

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