



# New Mexico's Broad New Helmet Law Governs Minors



NATIONAL CENTER FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND CONTROL

## SUCCESS STORIES

*"The true penalty for not wearing a helmet is sustaining a traumatic brain injury, not receiving a traffic ticket. We want the public to focus on the real purpose of the law. Helmets protect children from injuries that may result in extensive rehabilitation, permanent disability, or even death, all for entirely preventable reasons."*

*John McPhee, Childhood Injury Prevention Coordinator*

### SUMMARY

On July 1, 2007, the New Mexico Legislature passed the most comprehensive helmet use law in the United States. This law requires that all minors younger than 18 years wear helmets when using non-motorized vehicles, including bicycles, skateboards, scooters, in-line skates, or tricycles. The New Mexico SAFE KIDS Coalition, as well as numerous public and private organizations, supported the legislation. Not obeying this law is a civil violation, not a criminal one, so the offense will not be entered on a child's or parent's public record. However, police can stop children who are violating the helmet law, fit them with helmets, and call their parents to retrieve them.

### CHALLENGE

Children who use non-motorized vehicles are always at risk for traumatic brain injuries, especially in collisions with motor vehicles. Small children are particularly at risk due to less developed motor skills, unreliable reaction to or recognition of hazards, and are hard to see from a moving car. Getting children to wear helmets can be difficult—they may forget to put them on or think that wearing helmets is inconvenient, impractical when switching activities, or "not cool." Educating parents and caregivers so that they reinforce helmet use is essential but requires significant time and effort.

### TARGET AUDIENCE

The helmet use law reaches many diverse populations in New Mexico including American Indian Tribes, rural mountain communities, and both agricultural and urban communities where there continues to be a significant number of recent immigrants. While statewide laws reach everyone, tailored outreach will maximize community acceptance and implementation.





## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- Consult state civil codes to identify gaps in current helmet legislation.
- Partner with charitable organizations to provide helmets for children whose families cannot afford them.
- Hold community-wide events promoting helmet use.

### SOLUTION

The New Mexico SAFE KIDS Coalition, the New Mexico Department of Transportation, the Brain Injury Association of New Mexico, and the Brain Injury Advisory Council supported the New Mexico Legislature in passing the nation's most comprehensive helmet use law directed toward minors. Developing the programs to implement this law has resulted in one of the largest injury-prevention collaborations in New Mexico history. The New Mexico SAFE KIDS Coalition worked with a statewide SAFE KIDS network, law enforcement, fire departments, regional transportation offices, park and recreation departments, and schools to reach out to their respective communities. The groups sponsor helmet "give-aways" and fittings, traffic safety "rodeos," and events such as dirt-track races and acrobatic contests where helmet use is required. The organizations use fundraising donations to purchase helmets that are given to children at sponsored events and during police patrol stops.

### SUCCESS

Initially, many preschools opposed requiring children on non-motorized vehicles to use helmets. These schools were concerned that helmets would be shared, increasing the risk of transmitting lice. After education efforts by SAFE KIDS, preschools agreed that each child should have his or her own helmet, to establish the habit of helmet use while preventing lice transmission. The SAFE KIDS network and its partners solicit donations from charitable and community organizations to provide helmets to children who use non-motorized vehicles. Police officers are also provided with helmets so they can give them to children who do not have one. Both groups provide helmets and conduct non-motorized vehicle safety events for children and youth statewide.

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