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Avoid Tragic Bicycle Accidents By Following These Safety Tips



As the weather in Chicago and Illinois improves, many bicyclists will dust off their bikes and start riding again. Biking is great exercise and a wonderful way to enjoy the nice weather. However, when a bicyclist is riding on a street, road, or other areas where they are likely to encounter vehicles, they need to be aware of the very real danger that sharing the road with motorists presents. It is really quite difficult to explain just how vulnerable a person is when a car-bicycle collision occurs. The only way I can explain it is to ask people to imagine that they are walking down the street when they are suddenly hit by a six-foot, three hundred pound man running at full speed around a corner.

Now, turn that man into steel, increase his speed by three and make him weigh seven times more. A pretty scary thought, isn't it?

There really is no way to completely eliminate this risk except by only riding a bicycle on paths where vehicles are prohibited. However, there are several safety tips that you can, and should, do to reduce the potential risks associated with riding a bike in Chicago and Illinois:

- **Wear a Helmet!** There is absolutely nothing more tragic than cases where a bicyclist is hit by a vehicle and, because he or she was not wearing a helmet, the car-bicycle accident causes the person to hit their head on the pavement at forty-miles per hour. The resulting injuries are virtually always death or major brain trauma. If you wear a helmet, this near certainty is significantly reduced or eliminated.

- **IT DOES MATTER.** Too many of my clients believe that there is no point in wearing a helmet. These clients believe that if they get hit by a car, the result will be the same anyway so why bother? This is absolutely not true. For example, in one case I had, our client was hit by a motorist that wasn't paying attention. The bicyclist was thrown from her bike, hit her head on the pavement, and was taken by ambulance to a local hospital. Because she was wearing her helmet, she survived the accident with very little long-term effects and was biking again by the next summer!

- **Follow the Laws of the Road, But Change the Mindset that Cars Have to Look Out for You.** While it is true motorists and drivers are required by law to share the road with a bicyclist, the consequences of you getting hit are far more serious than if you hit a car. Cars and trucks are bigger, faster, stronger and the vehicle's safety protections are vastly superior to yours. All too often a bicycle accident occurs because the bicyclist is relying on his or her experience as a driver and expects the motorists to follow the rules of the road. Unfortunately, there are too many people out there that are not as careful as they should be and bicyclists should always be aware of this fact. Always look out for motorists, even when you know they should be looking out for you. I usually ask clients to imagine all cars are being driven by the cast of Jersey Shore and that you should act accordingly.

- **Use Headlights, Signal by Waving, Wear the Bright Colored Safety Vests, Slow Down and Ride Further to the Left.** In one of my recent cases, a bicyclist was injured as she passed by a local parking garage. The vehicle that hit this bicyclist was pulling out of the parking garage at the time and simply didn't see the bicyclist. Bicyclists are often struck when a car that doesn't see them suddenly, and unexpectedly, pulls out in front of them. This situation is particularly common in Chicago where the parking garages' exits are located in the middle of busy streets. By making yourself more visible, you are far more likely to avoid this situation.

- **Try Not to Ride Close to Parked Cars, Slow Down, and Ride as Far to the Left as Possible.** Many a bike messenger will tell you what a harrowing experience it is to be cruising along a street and suddenly have a motorist that just parked their car open the door in front of you. If you are riding your bike too fast, or are too close to the cars, you will not have enough space or time to react and will find yourself suddenly stopped.
- **Walk, Do Not Ride, Your Bike Across Intersections and Crosswalk.** Probably the most common tragic bike accident takes place when a car hits a bicyclist that is trying to cross a street. At least once a year there is a [news article](#) about a tragic car-bike accident where a bicyclist is killed crossing a street. There is nothing so urgent that you should be risking your life needlessly by riding your bike across a crosswalk or intersection.
- **Avoid Riding Your Bike on a Sidewalk.** As already stated, motorists must share the road with bicyclists. However, many people feel that it is unsafe to ride on the streets because of all the large, fast moving vehicles. However, riding on the sidewalk can lead to many of the accidents that occur (ie getting hit by vehicles pulling out of driveways/garages, intersection accidents). It is also dangerous because you could hit pedestrians. The problem about pedestrians is especially problematic near schools for obvious reasons.
- **Biking is Not a Fashion Statement. Wear the Safety Gear.** Ever see that James Dean movie where his leather jacket looked cooler as it swished up and down as he peddled his ten speed? Yeah, me neither. Biking is a lot of fun, great exercise, and, by engaging in the exercise, you are already going to look cooler than your buddies that sit on a couch all the time. If you really believe wearing bright colored clothes, helmets, elbow pads, and other safety gear is cramping your style then just imagine the cramp permanent hair loss and a metal plate in your head will be! Please wear the proper safety gear and protect yourself.

Of course, this is not an extensive list, and bicyclists are well advised to educate themselves further on bicycle safety. For further reading, I suggest people visit the Department of Transportation, Federal Highway and Administration's [website on Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety](#). Another good article about [bicycle safety is available here](#).

In Illinois and Chicago these problem are compounded by the changing weather. During the winter months very few people will ride bikes and motorists simply forget to look out for them. Many bicyclists are well advised to be aware of this issue and be extremely safety conscience during the spring (and summer) months.

At [Shunneson Law Office](#), we have years of experience in handling bicycle accidents with motor vehicles. Given the potential severity of the injuries, you need an experienced [attorney](#) to help you through these difficult times. I am devoted to demanding an

at-fault party's insurance company cover injuries following accidents. Call (847) 693-9120 for more information.

-Drake Shunneson (copyright 2012)

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