

Handling Hazards

Railroad Tracks: Be sure to cross railroad tracks at a 90-degree angle; otherwise, the tracks may trap the front wheel, causing a fall.

Potholes: Hitting a pothole can cause a fall and injury or, at a minimum, damage wheel rims, spokes and forks. A wide swerve around a pothole can send you into the path of an overtaking car. Use the “rock dodge” maneuver to avoid potholes.

Grates: Tires may fall through sewer and drainage grates. Scan for traffic and move further into the lane to go around.

Rain: Watch out for slippery surfaces, especially leaves, motor oil and paint strips. Corner slowly, avoid puddles and brake early.

Sand, Gravel, Leaves: Steer around these when possible. If you must ride over them, steer a straight line and never brake or turn sharply.

Provisions of Florida Bicycle Laws are presented as a public service in the interest of improved highway safety by:

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Bicycles Are Vehicles



Florida Bicycle Laws and Safety Tips

Traffic Laws

In Florida, the bicycle is legally defined as a vehicle. Bicyclists have the same rights to the roadways and must obey the same traffic laws as the operators of other vehicles. The laws include: stopping at stop signs and red lights, riding with the flow of traffic, using lights at night, and yielding the right-of-way to other traffic when entering a roadway or changing course.

Below is a summary of the sections of code pertaining to bicycles.

Bicycle Regulations 316.2065 F.S.

- A bicyclist must obey applicable traffic control devices (traffic signs, markings and signals).
- A bicyclist must use a fixed, regular seat for riding.
- No bicycle may be used to carry more persons at one time than the number for which it is designed or equipped. (Exception: Adults may carry children in an infant sling.)
- Riders must keep at least one hand on the handlebars while riding.
- Every bicycle must be equipped with a brake or brakes that allow the rider to stop within 25 feet at a speed of 10 miles per hour on dry, level, clean pavement.
- Parents and guardians must not knowingly allow a child or minor ward to violate any provision of this section.

Wearing Helmet 316.2065 F.S.

- A bicycle rider or passenger who is under 16 years of age must wear a bicycle helmet that is properly fitted and is fastened securely upon the passenger's head by a strap, and meets a nationally recognized standard. The term “passenger” includes a child who is riding in a trailer or semitrailer attached to a bicycle.
- A bicycle rider or passenger who violates this subsection may be issued a citation by a law enforcement officer and assessed a fine for a nonmoving violation.



Sidewalk Riding 316.2065 F.S.

- When riding on sidewalks or in crosswalks, a bicyclist has all the rights and duties of a pedestrian but is still subject to bicycle equipment regulations.
- A bicyclist riding on sidewalks or in crosswalks must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and must give an audible signal before passing.

Lighting 316.2065 F.S.

- A bicycle operated between sunset and sunrise must be equipped with a lamp on the front, exhibiting a white light visible from 500 feet to the front, and both a red reflector and a lamp on the rear, exhibiting a red light visible from 600 feet to the rear.
- Additional lighting is permitted and recommended. See the “Night Riding” section for safety tips.

Roadway Position 316.2065 F.S.

- A bicyclist who is traveling at less than the speed of other traffic must ride in a bicycle lane, if provided, otherwise as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway. A bicyclist may leave the bicycle lane or right-most portion of the roadway in the following situations: when passing, making a left turn, to avoid hazards, or when a lane is too narrow for a bicycle and a car to share it safely.
- A bicyclist operating on a one-way street with two or more traffic lanes may ride as close to the left-hand edge of the roadway as is practicable.
- Riding in single file is required except on bike paths or parts of roadways set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles, or when two persons riding side-by-side within a single lane at less than the speed of traffic do not impede traffic.

Left Turns 316.151 F.S.

- A bicyclist intending to make a left turn is entitled to full use of the lane from which the turn is made.
- In addition to the normal left turn, a bicyclist may proceed through the right-most portion of the intersection and turn as close to the curb or edge as possible at the far side. After complying with any official traffic control device, the bicyclist may proceed in the new direction of travel.

Signaling Turns 316.155 F.S. and 316.157 F.S.

- A signal of intention to turn must be given by the bicyclist during the last 100 feet traveled before turning. If a bicyclist needs both hands for control, the signal need not be given continuously.
- A bicyclist may signal intent to turn right either by extending the left hand and arm upward or by extending the right hand and arm horizontally to the right side of the bicycle.

Headsets 316.304 F.S.

- A bicyclist must not wear a headset, headphone, or other listening device (other than a hearing aid) when riding. Wearing a headset blocks out important audio cues needed to detect the presence of other traffic.

Motor Vehicles 316.083 F.S.

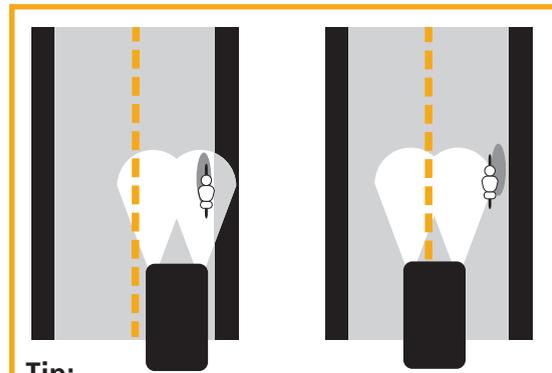
- The driver of a vehicle overtaking a bicycle must pass the bicycle at a safe distance of not less than three feet between the vehicle and the bicycle.

Avoiding Crashes

Night Riding

A significant percentage of all adult fatal bicycle accidents in Florida occur during twilight and night hours. Many factors compound the danger of riding at night such as:

- Motorists driving under the influence of alcohol.
- Motorists' ability to see what is ahead is limited to the area illuminated by headlights. Visibility is further reduced by the glare from lights of oncoming cars.
- Roadways with motor vehicle speeds above 40 mph pose extra risk at night, especially for cyclists without good reflectors, tail and head lights.
- At night, a motorist may not immediately recognize that a red reflector on the rear of a bicycle is attached to something on or near the roadway. A tail light and additional reflective gear on the bike or on the cyclist can help a driver recognize a bicycle ahead more easily (see "Safety Equipment" section).



Tip:

When a car approaches from the rear at night, watch your shadow as it is cast by the headlights. If it moves to the right as the car nears, the driver has moved to the left to pass. If it is stationary, the driver has not detected you. *Get out of the way!*

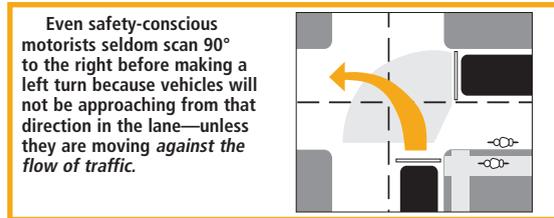
For those who must ride at night, use of additional lighting and reflectors is strongly encouraged. The use of leg lamps or any other lights that create motion should be considered. Battery-powered and generator-type systems are readily available and a small investment when it comes to staying alive. Reflective tape on the bicycle and reflective clothes are additional insurance.

Failure to Yield

A crash may be caused by failure on the part of the bicyclist or motorist to yield the right-of-way at driveways and intersections. A cyclist should watch vehicle movement. Bicyclists can help prevent crashes by yielding the right-of-way when required to, stopping for red lights and stop signs, and scanning to make sure the way is clear before turning left.

Wrong-Way Riding

Another cause of bicycle/car crashes is bicyclists riding against traffic. By riding against traffic, bicyclists remove themselves from the normal scanning pattern of other vehicle operators, making them more likely to be hit. In addition, the reaction time of both the motorist and bicyclist approaching one another is cut dramatically. Riding on the right, as required by law, can help prevent this crash from happening.



Opening Car Doors/Parked Cars

Some crashes are the result of a motorist opening the door of a parked car in front of an overtaking bike. Avoid this by riding no closer than three feet to a parked car. Also, be sure to watch for signs that a motorist wants to move into traffic. Be prepared to use the "panic stop."

Overtaking Cars

Statistically, this is not a big problem during daylight hours. In urban areas, it typically involves a motorist who misjudged passing space in a lane that both the motorist and the cyclist were attempting to share. Many bicyclists worry about what is behind them (this is why some ride against traffic). Becoming proficient at scanning (see Scanning Tips) to occasionally check traffic to the rear will ease worries about involvement in this type of accident.

Communicating With Motorists

Always signal your intentions and needs and exercise courtesy where applicable. A simple wave of the hand as a "thank you" gesture can let motorists know you appreciate their attention to your safety needs.

Scanning Tips

Like most riding skills, scanning to the rear takes practice. If you have trouble looking over your shoulder without swerving, try the following:

- Get a friend to hold your handlebars while you sit on the bike. Look over your left shoulder, keeping both hands on the handlebars, and notice what your hands, arms, and shoulders are doing. Your left side is probably pulling back on the handlebar.
- After a little practice at moving only your head, find an empty parking lot and try it while riding in a straight line. Then try dropping your left hand and resting it on your thigh while looking over your left shoulder and coasting for a while.

Safety Equipment

Helmets: Nearly 75 percent of all bicycle-related deaths are the result of head injuries. The use of helmets would prevent many of these deaths.

A bicycle shop is a good place to buy a helmet. A knowledgeable professional should assist you with selection and proper fit.

Gloves: Gloves provide protection for hands in case of a fall and cushion them from handlebar vibration.

Mirror: Use a rearview mirror to keep track of traffic approaching from behind. Mirrors that attach to glasses or a helmet allow for scanning by turning your head from side to side. Some attach on the handlebars but may only give a view of your leg or hip. Shop with care.

Lights and Reflective Gear: Important for any after-dark riding, inexpensive LED headlights and taillights for bicycles can now run for many hours on alkaline or rechargeable batteries. In addition to the rear reflector required after sunset, reflective elements on ankle straps, backpacks, and other gear can also help a cyclist stand out at night.

Rear Carrier: Bicycle riding requires concentration. Do not add to distractions by trying to carry things in your hands. Use a carrier.

Emergency Maneuvers

Note: There is an element of risk in practicing these emergency maneuvers. You may fall, so wear long pants, long sleeves, gloves and a helmet. Start slowly, then work up to normal speed.

Rock Dodge: A wide swerve around a pothole or rock can send you into the path of an overtaking auto. A "rock dodge" allows you to avoid these hazards without swerving.



For practice, toss a sponge into a clear area in an empty parking lot. Slowly pedal toward the sponge, and at the last second, turn your handlebars left to avoid it. Quickly turn back to the right to prevent a fall. Then straighten out. Hitting the object with your rear wheel is not serious, since the front wheel steers the bicycle.

Emergency Turns: If a car suddenly turns into your path, what do you do? Hopefully, you anticipate the problem and can stop in time. If you can't stop, then turn with the car. To do this, turn the front wheel to the left toward the car, forcing your body to lean to the right. Now quickly turn to the right at a sharp angle to follow alongside the car. Most times, you will avoid the collision.

Practice this technique in the parking lot. It will probably feel uncomfortable at first.

Panic Stop: Stopping fast requires a harder use of the front brake than of the rear brake. However, this can cause you to catapult. To counteract this, practice the following in an empty parking lot wearing a helmet: Ride slowly; then, at a predetermined point, apply both brakes evenly while moving back on the saddle and lowering your chest horizontally. As you move back and down, apply greater pressure to the front brake until it is about three times the pressure on the rear brake.

Continue practicing at gradually faster speeds, but remember, if you feel the rear wheel beginning to skid, let off the front brake a bit.