STREET SMART

PALO ALTO

A Student’s Guide to Smart Biking
The great thing about biking when you’re a kid is all the places you can go.

Biking is about fun, freedom & friends.
And now more than ever, biking is one of the best things we can do for ourselves, our community and the planet.
Remember to physically distance when riding—

Leave at least 6 feet between yourself, other riders, pedestrians & outdoor diners, unless you are wearing a mask.
As long as you ride 6 feet from others you don’t need to wear a mask,

BUT carry one in case the street or trail gets crowded, or if outdoor diners are sitting close to where you are riding.
Knowing how to get around safely and well on your bike can be your ticket to freedom.

Here’s what you need to know about riding the streets...
These Slides Address the Following:

Part 1: Riding Basics: Where and How

Part 2: Staying Safe: Stopping and Rules of the Road

Part 3: Riding in Groups: With Friends & Family

Part 4: Stuff you Need: Helmets and Lights

Part 5: Biking All Year Long
1. Riding Basics: Where and How
Where to Ride

Bicyclists should ride in a straight, predictable line in the same direction as car traffic...
Where to Ride

...because under traffic law, bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as motor vehicles.
Where to Ride

Ride in the bike lane when there is one and be mindful of obstacles like parked cars, trash cans or debris that might block your lane.
When you see this symbol, a “sharrow,” it means a lane is meant to be shared by vehicles and bicyclists. The arrow points to where on the road bicyclists should be riding.
When there is no bike lane and no sharrow, ride at least an arms length from parked cars (up to 6-8 feet) so that if a parked car’s door suddenly opened, it wouldn’t hit you.
Where to Ride

Faster traffic should pass slower traffic, when it’s safe, **ON THE LEFT**. When there are two lanes, slower traffic should only be in the left lane if about to make a left turn.
Hot Tip!

Keep a close eye on windows and mirrors of parked cars, since movement inside means the driver may be about to move or open the car door.
If possible, ride on streets that don’t get much car traffic, and try to use off-street bike paths when available.
Where to Ride

For ‘Walk & Roll to School’ maps, go to the Palo Alto Safe Routes to School website.

www.cityofpaloalto.org/saferoutes

The “Walk and Roll to Palo Alto Libraries” maps suggest good routes across town.
Predictability is super important on streets. Everyone should be able to tell what others are likely to do next. That’s why following the rules of the road is crucial.
Ride in as straight a line as possible as you follow the road.

Unless you SIGNAL or are in a turning lane, others expect you to keep going straight.
DON’T weave in and out of parked cars. It surprises drivers and other bikers when someone suddenly pops out from behind a parked car.
How to Ride

Bikes don’t have turn signals like cars.

**HAND SIGNALS** are how bikers let others on the road know they plan to change lanes or turn.
How to Ride

Before you signal to change lanes or turn,
LOOK over your left shoulder to scan for traffic
Then
LOOK over your left shoulder one more time before you merge.
Hot Tip!

One of the best safety devices for bikes is the BICYCLE REAR-VIEW MIRROR.
Knowing how fast someone is coming from behind and if they’ve seen you lets you know if you need to get the driver’s attention or even pull over for safety.
How to Ride

Best of all, a rear-view mirror lets you track who’s coming up from behind without having to look away from the road ahead nearly as often.
How to Ride

But even with a mirror, make sure you also always turn around to double-check the way is clear before changing lanes or turning.
When you turn around to look behind, it’s easy to accidentally SWERVE.

So PRACTICE off the street until you can look behind without swerving.
How to Ride

To signal a LEFT TURN:

Point with your LEFT arm straight out to the left
To signal a **RIGHT TURN**: 

Point with your **RIGHT** arm straight out to the right. 

OR

Raise your **LEFT** hand with a bent elbow.
To signal a **STOP**: Bend your left arm down with your open palm to the back. (No need to signal ‘stop’ at a stop sign, only when others aren’t expecting you to stop.)
How to Ride

Remember, NOT signalling tells drivers, other bicyclists, and pedestrians you PLAN TO KEEP RIDING STRAIGHT.
Sometimes drivers (and bicyclists) FORGET to signal.

WATCH OUT for cars & other bicyclists who may have forgotten to signal.
The fine for forgetting to signal before turning or changing lanes is $238 in California. (Plus, for drivers, $1,000+ in higher insurance costs.)
2. Staying Safe: Stopping & Rules of the Road
Staying Safe

Most crashes can be avoided if you pay close attention to your surroundings.
Staying Safe

One of the most important senses you need when biking is HEARING.

Legally, one earbud is allowed, however avoid wearing ANYTHING that blocks your ability to hear.
Staying Safe

Be really careful when you ride out of a driveway. **LOOK LEFT, RIGHT & LEFT AGAIN** to make sure the sidewalk and roadway are clear.
Staying Safe

Cars parked on the street are hard to see around, so ‘inch out’ slowly until you can see around them to make sure the way is clear.
Staying Safe

If the sidewalk is crowded...

or you are downtown on

- Cal. Ave. or
- University Ave.

...you will need to WALK YOUR BIKE.
Staying Safe

Riding on sidewalks IS NOT ALLOWED in the Cal. Ave. or University Ave. business districts.
If for safety reasons you need to ride on a sidewalk then ride no faster than if you were walking. Get off your bike if you need to pass by walkers.
If you are on the sidewalk, watch for cars that might be pulling out of or into driveways.
Staying Safe

Drivers have **BLIND SPOTS** where the frame of their car blocks their view.

Don’t assume a car **YOU CAN SEE** has **SEEN YOU**.
Staying Safe

Drivers can’t check their blind spots well until they stop moving, so a car that doesn’t make a complete stop can easily miss seeing a biker or walker.
Staying Safe

#1 Rule:

ALWAYS MAKE EYE CONTACT

...with drivers before you ride out in front of them.
Sometimes in a bike lane traffic next to you will slow way down, and you find yourself in the awkward position of passing drivers on their right...
Possible Conflicts

Avoiding Collisions

Ride EXTRA carefully when traffic slows down or when approaching an intersection from the bike lane. *Drivers don’t expect* anyone to pass on their right and may unexpectedly turn into your lane.
Traffic law REQUIRES BICYCLISTS TO COME TO A COMPLETE STOP at stop signs, like cars.
Did you know?

Not stopping completely **AT THE STOP LINE** *(before the crosswalk)* can cost you a $238 fine *and* result in a collision.
Stopping on a Bike

Even if NO cars or pedestrians are around, bicyclists still need to stop at every stop sign...
...but, if no cars are around, bicyclists sometimes stop by BALANCING IN PLACE instead of putting their foot on the ground. It’s called a ‘track stand.’
Stopping on a Bike

Most cyclists don't know how to do a track stand.

If you don't know how to do one, put your foot on the ground to indicate that you are stopping at a stop sign.
Stopping on a Bike

Riders who are really good at track stands can balance upright in place indefinitely.
No one *likes* to stop at stop signs, least of all bicyclists because it loses momentum. But because that’s the law, we have to follow it.
My leg muscles are SO much stronger!
My balance is SO much better!

Stopping on a Bike
Instead of focusing on being ANNOYED at having to stop, focus on the OPPORTUNITY stopping brings to practice your balance and workout your muscles.
As you slow down to stop, **SHIFT DOWN** to a gear that makes it easier to pedal.
Who should go **FIRST** at an intersection is decided by traffic **RIGHT-OF-WAY RULES**. ("Right-of-Way" means who gets to go first.)
AT INTERSECTIONS & CROSSWALKS PEDESTRIANS HAVE THE RIGHT-OF-WAY, which means *the right to go first*. But don’t assume that because you have the right-of-way someone will let you go first. Always make eye contact before crossing.
A pedestrian is anyone walking, running, in a wheelchair, or on a NON-electric scooter or skateboard.
Electric scooters and electric skateboards can not be ridden without a valid driver’s license.
Anytime a bicyclist wants to cross the street using the crosswalk, they need to get off & WALK their bike.

This is especially important when trying to cross a busy street.
A bicyclist or driver who **DOESN’T LET A PEDESTRIAN GO BEFORE THEM** at an intersection or crosswalk can be fined $238.
1. Vehicles get to go according to who arrived FIRST

Rules of the Road

At a 4-WAY STOP (once pedestrians have crossed) cyclists & drivers get to go in the order of who stopped fully at the STOP LINE FIRST.
When other bicyclists & drivers are at the intersection with you, putting a foot down when your front tire reaches the STOP line helps everyone know when you’ve ‘arrived’ at the intersection.
Drivers will often want to let cyclists go first at intersections, regardless who has right-of-way. Practice letting drivers go ahead if they have right of way. Everyone will be safer!
Rules of the Road

Not all intersections are 4-WAY STOPS. Look UNDER the STOP SIGN to see how many directions of traffic have to stop, especially at Traffic Circles.
At this Traffic Circle only two directions of traffic have to stop. The bicyclist must wait for the car to pass before entering.

Roundabouts follow similar rules, except all traffic must YIELD to traffic in the circle.
Rules of the Road

Once cross traffic is clear, the bicyclist can enter the traffic circle or roundabout.

Ride **in the middle** of the travel lane so no one tries to squeeze by and pass you unsafely.
Pedestrian beacons help pedestrians cross busy streets. They only come on when a pedestrian pushes the crosswalk button.
Rules of the Road

When a pedestrian pushes the pedestrian beacon button, the light flashes yellow, then solid yellow, then solid red. Yellow means PREPARE to stop.

Yellow Lights means PREPARE to stop
Solid Red Lights means STOP

Rules of the Road

When the pedestrian beacon is solid red traffic must stop for pedestrians to cross.
Rules of the Road

When the pedestrian beacon starts flashing red it means traffic must stop, check for any pedestrians still crossing, then proceed only if the crosswalk is clear.
3. Riding in Groups:

Fun With Friends & Family
When riding in a group on a lane shared with cars, you may need to ride single file so cars can still pass you safely on your left.
Riding side-by-side should only happen when no cars are trying to pass from behind. (A rear-view mirror helps you track this.)
Riding in Groups

If you find yourself in a large group try to ride with no more than 1 cyclist, or the width of a car, next to you.
Riding in Groups

LEAVE SPACE between riders and DON’T OVERLAP WHEELS with the rider ahead. If they move over to dodge an obstacle you’ll both go down.
To pass a slower biker on the street (or a pedestrian on a path) call out “PASSING ON YOUR LEFT” before you ride by them on their left side.

Riding in Groups

Passing on your left!
I know I’m fast... I don’t have to prove it by speeding up.

Riding in Groups

No matter how tempting, NEVER SPEED UP when another bicyclist is passing. For safety, they need to be able to get around you quickly.
Riding in Groups

If you see a hazard in the road ahead (like a pothole, rock, bump, glass, etc.), call it out and point down to it to warn the cyclists behind you as you go around it.
Riding in Groups

Each biker in a group is responsible for making a complete stop at every stop sign, and following the rules of the road...
Riding in Groups

...BUT, up to two bicyclists can STOP next to each other at a stop sign *if* they are RIDING TOGETHER/GOING THE SAME WAY.
Riding in Groups

When riding in a group it helps to call out “Stopping” or “Braking” as you slow down, so that bikers behind you can react more quickly.
Riding in Groups

You have the right to use the full lane and drivers can only pass when they have 3 feet of clearance. BUT, If 5+ cars are behind a bicyclist, by law the biker has to pull over to let the cars pass.
4. Stuff You Need: Helmets & Lights
Helmets protect your brain in case of a fall or crash. Without a helmet your risk of head injury or concussion in a crash is much higher.
Did you know?

Inventors created a helmet to look like LEGO minifigure hair. Someday, LEGO fans may get to wear their favorite LEGO hair as a helmet!
Meanwhile, a helmet was also invented that decreases your concussion risk in a bike accident by nearly 98%! And unlike LEGO hair helmets, ARE already available.
Under California law, youth under 18 have to wear a well-fitting, BUCKLED HELMET when riding wheels like bikes, scooters and skateboards.
Helmets

A well-fitting helmet should feel snug but not tight and sit level on the head...

To fit a helmet, remember the “2-2-2 Rule”.

FITS SNUG & LEVEL
Helmets

... not more than **2 fingers** should fit between your eyebrow ridge & the helmet...
Helmets

...the straps should make **2 V’s** that meet just below your earlobes...
Helmets

...and 2 fingers should fit between your chin and the helmet’s chinstrap.
When you shake your head the helmet shouldn’t move.

Helmets
Helmets

The protective material in helmets breaks down over time so they need to be replaced every 3-5 years for growing students. If you are ever involved in a bike crash replace your helmet, even if it seems wearable.
Wear a helmet.
Buckle it.
Protect your brain.
Also it’s the law.
Please don’t make anyone have to remind you.
Did you know?

On a bicycle, you are safer if you can be seen, so wear bright or light colors, even when riding during the day, but especially at night, when possible.
When riding at night, bikes are required by law to have a **WHITE LIGHT IN FRONT**. A **RED TAIL LIGHT** is also essential to keeping you safe.
Lights

Even a flashlight or phone light strapped securely to your handlebar will work as a white light on the front.
At night, aim your front light slightly **DOWN** so you can see the road and so you don’t blind oncoming drivers.
Lights

During the day, use your lights in rain, fog, during the winter months when the sun reduces visibility or to be more visible.
The **BRIGHT** setting on lights is great for **DAYTIME**, but the **DIMMER** setting is better at **NIGHT**, so you don’t blind drivers.
You can add stick-on reflectors to your bike and helmet to be seen better by cars at night. Reflective bike tires and clothing help too.
Useful Accessories

Use baskets and racks and special bags called “panniers” to securely carry musical instruments, sports equipment or anything you might need.
Secure large items, as needed, with bungee cords.
Useful Accessories

Make sure nothing dangles where it can get caught in the wheels or chain

Dangling Cord!
Useful Accessories

Don’t carry items on your handlebars or in your hands.

You need both hands to steer and brake!
Always lock your bicycle when leaving it. Lock the frame and at least one tire to rack. U-locks are recommended. Practice using your lock before riding.
5. Riding Year-Round
Riding Year-Round

BEFORE each ride, do a quick safety check, called the:

“A.B.C. QUICK CHECK”
A is for AIR

Squeeze the tires to make sure they aren’t low or flat.

Add air if they are, or ask an adult to help.
Check the side of your tire for how much air it needs, every tire is different. The maximum helps you roll fastest. Riding below the minimum can get you a "pinch flat".

Inflate to 30-50 PSI

(PSI stands for "pounds per square inch")
Squeeze the brakes to make sure they stop the bike.

Don’t ride if they don’t, or if you have to squeeze the brake too tightly to make it stop.
C is for CHAIN

If you are having trouble shifting or turning the chain it may need to be cleaned/oiled. Ask an adult for help with this.
IF your bike’s tires (or seat) have ‘quick release’ levers, make sure they are tight.

Tighten if loose.
Riding Year-Round

CHECK is for “Check Your Overall Bike”

Start riding your bike slowly to check for loose or broken parts, or make sure you have your lock, a water bottle, rain gear, sunscreen etc., if needed.
Riding Year-Round

Also **CHECK** to make sure you have sunglasses, water, rainwear, etc. and start your ride slowly to make sure there are no issues.
Thanks for learning,

Have fun on your bike!
Special thanks to Sonia Elkes for creating this presentation content.

For more updates, check out Palo Alto’s Safe Routes to School website at cityofpaloalto.org/saferoutes