

Bicycle Rules and Regulations

California Vehicle Code (as it pertains to bicycles)

Learning the rules of the road is key to being a safe bicyclist. The following are important excerpts from the California Vehicle Code (VC) relating to the operation and equipping of bicycles.

Bicycle Defined. VC 231

Defines bicycle as a device upon which any person may ride, propelled exclusively by human power through a belt, chain, or gears and having one or more wheels. Specifically provides that persons riding bicycles are subject to Vehicle Code provisions specified in Sections 21200 and 21200.5 (see below).



Bicycle Use. VC 21200

Every person riding a bicycle upon a street or highway has all the rights and is subject to all the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle.

Bicycling Under Influence of Alcohol or Drugs. VC 21200.5

It is unlawful to ride a bicycle upon a street or highway while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage or drug or the combination of alcohol and a drug, punishable by a fine of up to \$250.

Equipment Requirements. VC 21201

- a) No person shall operate a bicycle on a roadway unless it is equipped with a brake which will enable the operator to make one braked wheel skid on dry, level, clean pavement.
- b) No person shall operate on the highway any bicycle equipped with handlebars so raised that the operator must elevate their hands above the level of their shoulders in order to grasp the normal steering grip area.
- c) Every bicycle operated upon any highway during darkness shall be equipped with the following:
 - (1) A lamp emitting a white light that, while the bicycle is in motion, illuminates the highway, sidewalk, or bikeway in front of the bicyclist and is visible from a distance of 300 feet in front and from the sides of the bicycle.
 - (2) A red reflector on the rear that shall be visible from a distance of 500 feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful upper beams of head lamps on a motor vehicle.
 - (3) A white or yellow reflector on each pedal, shoe, or ankle visible from the front and rear of the bicycle from a distance of 200 feet.
 - (4) A white or yellow reflector on each side forward of the center of the bicycle, and a white or red reflector on each side to the rear of the center of the bicycle, except that bicycles that are equipped with reflective tires on the front and the rear need not be equipped with these side reflectors. The reflectors and reflective tires shall be of a type meeting requirements established by the department.
- d) A lamp or lamp combination, emitting a white light, attached to the operator and visible from a distance of 300 feet in front and from the sides of the bicycle, may be used in place of a lamp attached to the bike.

Duty of Bicycle Operator: Operation on Roadway. VC 21202

- a) Any person operating a bicycle upon a roadway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic moving in the same direction at such time shall ride as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway except under any of the following situations:

When overtaking and passing another bicycle or motor vehicle proceeding in the same direction.

When preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway.

When reasonably necessary to avoid conditions (including, but not limited to, fixed or moving objects, vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, animals, surface hazards, or substandard width lanes) that make it unsafe to continue along the right-hand curb or edge. For purposes of this section, a "substandard width lane" is a lane that is too narrow for a bicycle and a vehicle to travel safely side by side within the lane.

- b) Any person operating a bicycle on a one-way street or highway with two or more marked traffic lanes, may ride as near the left-hand curb or edge of such roadway as practicable.

Riding On Bicycle. VC 21204

- a) No person operating a bicycle on a highway shall ride other than on a permanent and regular attached seat.
- b) No person operating a bicycle on a highway shall allow anyone to ride as a passenger other than on a separate attached seat. If the passenger is four years old or younger or weighs 40 pounds or less, the seat shall adequately retain the passenger in place and protect him/her from the bicycle's moving parts.



Hitching Rides. VC 21203

No person riding upon any motorcycle, motorized bicycle, bicycle, coaster, roller skates, sled, or toy vehicle shall attach the same or themselves to any streetcar or vehicle on the roadway.

Carrying Articles. VC 21205

No person operating a bicycle shall carry any package, bundle, or article which prevents the operator from keeping at least one hand upon the handlebars.

Permitted Movements from Bicycle Lanes. VC 21208

- a) Whenever a bicycle lane has been established on a roadway, any person operating a bicycle upon the roadway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic moving in the same direction shall ride in the bicycle lane, except under the following situations:

When overtaking or passing another bicycle, vehicle, or pedestrian within the lane or about to enter the lane if such overtaking and passing cannot be done safely within the lane.

When preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway.

When necessary to leave the lane to avoid debris or other hazardous conditions.

- b) No operator of a bicycle shall leave a bicycle lane until it can be done safely and then only after giving an appropriate hand signal in the event that any vehicle might be affected by the movement.

Parking. VC 21210

No person shall leave a bicycle lying on its side on any sidewalk, or shall park a bicycle on a sidewalk in any other position, so that there is not an adequate path for pedestrian traffic. Local authorities may prohibit bicycle parking in designated areas of the public highway, provided appropriate signs are erected.

Obstruction of Bikeways. VC 21211

No person shall place or park a bicycle or vehicle so as to impede or block the normal and reasonable movement of any bicyclist on a bikeway or bicycle path or trail unless the placement or parking is necessary for safe operation or otherwise in compliance with the law.

Youth Helmets. VC 21212

Prohibits persons under 18 from riding or being a passenger on a bicycle without wearing helmets meeting specified standards (ANSI or SNELL). Violations are punishable by a fine of not more than \$25.



Bicycles on Roadways VC 21650.1

A bicycle operated on a roadway or highway shoulder shall be operated in the same direction as vehicles are required to drive upon the roadway.

Hand Signals. VC 22111

All required signals given by hand and arm shall be given in the following manner:

Left turn:

Hand and arm extended horizontally beyond the side of the bicycle.

Right turn:

Left hand and arm extended upward beyond the side of the bicycle or right hand and arm extended horizontally to the right side of the bicycle.

Stop or sudden decrease of speed:

Left hand and arm extended downward beyond the side of the bicycle.

Headsets and Earplugs. VC 27400

No person operating any vehicle, including a bicycle shall wear any headset covering, or any earplugs in, both ears.

Sidewalks Are For Walking On!

Many people are surprised to learn that riding your bike on the sidewalk is actually more dangerous than riding in a safe manner on the street, and often illegal! Sidewalks are meant to accommodate pedestrians. They are not intended for bicycles or other vehicles moving more swiftly than foot traffic. If you feel that you must ride on the sidewalk, be extra vigilant, as there is a greater chance of collision with a pedestrian or car. Comparative risk studies have shown that, due to poor visibility, space restrictions and other factors, sidewalk cycling presents a much greater risk than cycling in the street.

Bells and Horns

Yes, make some noise when you're riding. Let others know where you are if the situation calls for it. Don't be too shy to yell or whistle loudly. Keep in mind that drivers can't always hear little sounds like bells ringing. They may be rocking out or talking on the cell phone with the windows rolled up; so be loud or get something loud to wake them up. Bells are suggested for polite warnings or hellos, horns and yelling for more urgent warnings.

Common Mistakes

Seat Too Low

Feet Improperly on Pedals

Using the Wrong Gear

Not Stopping for a Stop Sign

Riding in the Wrong Lane

Not Using Headlights and Taillights at Night

Not Listening

The Door Zone

This is one of the most common cycling accidents. Getting doored is when a driver in a parked car suddenly opens his or her door in front of you and you run into the door. Luckily this is one of the easiest accidents to avoid. Just don't ride in the door zone. Make sure that you ride far enough to the left so that you allow for at least 3 - 5 feet between your bicycle and the parked cars next to you. Remember: California Vehicle Code states that the cyclist need only ride as far to the right as practicable. Riding in the door zone is not safe, and the vehicle code grants you the right to avoid it. If you really feel that you must ride in the door zone, make sure that you're riding slowly enough to check for drivers sitting in their parked cars, and so that you have enough time to stop if a door should happen to open in front of you. Keep in mind, this is a very common accident, often resulting in serious injury. A door can catch the end of your handlebar and throw you into traffic. We suggest that you never ride in the door zone.



Please Ride Safely!

