

# Health Reports, April 2017

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## Cycling in Canada

Cycling for leisure or for transport is a valuable form of exercise in an era when nearly one-third of children and about two-thirds of adults are overweight or obese. A new study highlights recent statistics on cycling, as well as trends in cycling-related fatalities and in the prevalence of helmet use.

In 2013/2014, 41% of Canadians aged 12 or older (an estimated 12 million) reported that they had cycled in the previous 12 months. Percentages were higher in Quebec (48%) and Manitoba (46%) and lower in the Atlantic Provinces (from 18% in Newfoundland and Labrador to 32% in New Brunswick), Saskatchewan and Ontario (both 38%) and Nunavut (23%). Males were considerably more likely than females to report cycling in the past year: 46% versus 34%.

Cycling declined with age. A large majority (82%) of 12- to 14-year-olds reported cycling. At age 50 or older, the percentage was 27%.

Cycling was more common among people in higher-education and higher-income households.

## Fatalities

From 1994 to 2012, 1,408 cyclists died in crashes, an average of 74 each year. This was a drop from the 1980-to-1994 period when the annual average number of deaths was 111. At that time, 57% of cyclist deaths involved people younger than age 20, compared with 30% of the more recent deaths. Most of those killed were male.

Annual cycling fatality rates fluctuated during the 1994-to-2012 period, from a low of 1.6 deaths per million population (2003) to a high of 2.9 deaths per million (1994), but remained below rates in the 1980s, which ranged from 3.0 to 4.5 per million. The fatality rate for cyclists in 2012 was 2.6 deaths per million population, lower than the fatality rates for pedestrians and motor vehicle occupants at 9.0 and 43.0 deaths per million, respectively. While these rates are useful for comparison, they are not indicative of the risk specific to cyclists.

## Helmet use

Of the estimated 12 million cyclists aged 12 or older in 2013/2014, 42% reported "always" wearing a helmet when they cycled during the previous year; the remaining 58% did so "most of the time," "rarely" or "never."

Female cyclists were more likely than male cyclists to always wear a helmet—46% compared with 39%. Helmet use was also highest in the early adolescent (12 to 14) years and at age 50 or older, with about half of cyclists reporting that they always wore a helmet. In the later teen (15 to 17) and early adult (18 to 24) years, around one-quarter of cyclists always wore a helmet. Helmet use was much more common than it was 20 years ago.

Data for 2013/2014 suggest that people who wear bicycle helmets tended to be more cautious. For example, cyclists who "always" wore a helmet were more likely than other cyclists to always use a seatbelt when driving or as a passenger (90% versus 76%) and to have had a flu shot in the past year (33% versus 20%). Helmet users were less likely than non-users to smoke (10% versus 21%) or to engage in heavy episodic drinking (17% versus 27%). These associations between bicycle helmet use and other precautionary behaviours remained even when age, sex and education were taken into account.



### **Note to readers**

The data are from the 1994/1995 National Population Health Survey (NPHS), the 2013/2014 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and the Vital Statistics–Death Database. Study samples comprised 17,626 (NPHS) and 128,310 (CCHS) respondents.

Cyclist (past 12-month) included bicycle use for leisure or transport.

Helmet users "always" (versus "most of the time," "rarely" or "never") wore a helmet when cycling.

Cyclist deaths in 2000 through 2012 were identified by codes V10 to V19 in ICD-10. Before 2000, ICD-9 codes were E810 to E819 (with .6 to identify the injured person as a pedal cyclist), E820 to E825 (with .6) and E826.1.

"Cycling in Canada" is now available in the April 2017 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 28, no. 4 (**82-003-X**).

This issue of *Health Reports* also contains the article, "Housing conditions and respiratory hospitalizations among First Nations people in Canada."

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