

tips for consumers

from your
BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU

Bob was riding his bike without a chain guard. Suddenly his foot caught between the pedal and the chain and he fell, fracturing his skull.

As Jimmy was riding his bike downhill, the bike's front wheel suddenly became loose and twisted. He lost control and crashed to the ground, fracturing his knee.

Accident stories like these cited by the Consumer Product Safety Commission are sobering, especially if you're buying a bike for your child this holiday season. The Better Business Bureau says that accidents such as the above can be prevented by buying a safe bike and making sure it stays in a safe condition.

BUYING THE BIKE

When you buy children's clothes, perhaps you buy them a little large so your children can grow into them. There's nothing wrong with that. But a bicycle is different; it should fit the size your child is today. If it's too big, your child won't be able to handle it safely. To see if a bike is not too large, have your child sit on the seat; he should be able to touch the ground with his foot.

Don't buy a bike with slippery plastic pedals. Much safer are rubber-treaded pedals or metal pedals with serrated edges.

Don't buy a bike that has sharp points and edges, such as along fenders, or with protruding bolts that could scrape or tear clothing. And be sure the bike has a chain guard.

A headlight and rear reflector are musts if your child will be riding at night. Other precautions for night time riding are reflective tape on fenders, handlebars, chain guards and wheel sidewalls. Many bikes are equipped with reflectors on the pedals.

The sting ray bikes that are so popular—with banana seats, small wheels and high handlebars—aren't as safe as conventional bikes. They are more likely to tip over because of the shorter wheel base and the high handlebars. The banana seats invite riding

double or doing "wheelies" (tipping back on the rear wheel), both dangerous practices. So keep this in mind if your child asks for this type of bike.

MAINTENANCE

Children are hard on bikes, so it's very important for you to keep a close check on the condition of your child's bike.

* If wheels become wobbly, align them.

* Tighten or adjust any loose parts.

* Replace any parts that are missing, damaged or worn.

* Inflate tires to recom-

mended pressure and replace them when they're worn.

* Oil and clean moving parts, keeping the oil off tires.

A bike can be only as safe as the way it's ridden. When you give the bike to your child, also give some advice about safety. Examples:

* Ride near the curb in the same direction as traffic.

* Avoid riding through busy intersections or along roads with heavy or high-speed traffic—find alternative routes.

* Avoid riding in wet weather, since handbrakes are not as efficient when wet.

* Don't cross sewer grates where wheels could get stuck.

* Take precautions to prevent loose clothing from catching in pedals or wheels; put rubberbands around loose pants legs.

If you wish to report what you consider to be a dangerous bicycle or an injury related to a bike, you can call the Product Safety Commission's toll-free "Consumer Hot Line": 800/638-2666.

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