

Driver and Bicyclist Responsibility in Massachusetts

BE AWARE. BE COURTEOUS. BE SAFE.

Driver Responsibility toward Bicycles

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Driver's Manual, Chapter 3, Safety First, page 73

Except on limited-access or express state highways where prohibited by posted signs, bicyclists and moped riders have the same rights to use the public roadways as any other drivers.

They must obey the same traffic control and right-of way laws. But, like pedestrians, these riders are often difficult to see in traffic and are poorly protected against being hit by motor vehicles.

Be safe, when passing a bicycle or moped:

- Reduce your speed. The wind turbulence or air pressure change caused by your passing vehicle can throw a rider off balance.
- Leave plenty of room between your vehicle and riders.
- If you have too little room in your lane to pass safely, you must wait for oncoming traffic to pass or for the lane to widen.
- At night, you should dim your headlights if you meet an approaching bicyclist. Be aware that a bicyclist or moped rider might react to a road hazard and swerve suddenly, just like any other driver.
- Remember, you should respect the rights of a bicyclist to use the roadway, as you would respect the rights of another driver.

Bicyclist Responsibility

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Driver's Manual, Chapter 4, Rules of the Road, page 105

- Wear clothing with bright colors or reflective strips, especially at night.
- When you are riding a bicycle on public ways, state law subjects you to the same basic laws and regulations that apply to motor vehicle operators.
- You must obey all traffic signs and signals, ride single file with the flow of traffic, and yield to pedestrians.
- You must ride on the right side of the roadway, unless you are turning left. To turn left, signal, look, and move into the lane closest to the center line.
- It is strongly recommended that you avoid listening to headphones while riding.
- Before entering or crossing a roadway, you should stop, look left, look right, and look left again for traffic—even if it is a one-way street.
- When preparing to merge, stop, or turn, use hand signals to communicate your intentions to other roadway users. You may use either hand to signal.
- Use an audible signal bell, horn, or your voice to warn pedestrians.
- For nighttime operation, your bike must be equipped with a white headlight, red taillight, and/or rear reflector, pedal reflectors, and side reflectors. In addition, you must wear reflective ankle bands.
- You may use sidewalks outside business districts, unless there is a local ordinance prohibiting it.
- When operating on a sidewalk, you must yield the right of way to pedestrians.

State law requires that all bicyclists 16 years of age or younger must wear approved helmets when bicycling or riding as passengers on public ways or property. About 75% of bicycle-related deaths and disabling injuries could have been prevented if riders wore a proper bike helmet.

A properly fitted and fastened helmet sits just above the eyebrows. As an adult, you can set an important example for children by always wearing a helmet when cycling.