



Misleading claims

Cycle helmets are the subject of a great number of myths and exaggerations, some of which feature prominently in the promotion of helmets.

- [Cycle helmets prevent 85% of head injuries and 88% of brain injuries](#)
- [Cycle helmets could prevent 90% of fatalities](#)
- ["I know someone whose helmet saved his life"](#)

Cycle helmets prevent 85% of head injuries and 88% of brain injuries

This claim originates from a single source – Thompson, Rivara and Thompson, 1989 – and has never even been approached by real-world evidence anywhere. The research on which the prediction was made has been widely criticised for fundamental methodological errors. The researchers themselves revised their prediction downwards to 69% for head injuries in 1996 (Thompson, Rivara and Thompson, 1996), but this too remains greatly in excess of real-world experience.

In places where helmet use has become significant, there has been no detectable reduction in head injuries relative to cycle use.

See: [Why it is wrong to claim that cycle helmets prevent 85% of head injuries and 88% of brain injuries](#) for a full explanation as to why this claim is wrong.

Cycle helmets could prevent 90% of fatalities

This prediction also comes from a single source (Dorsch, Woodward and Somers, 1987) and is not reflected by real-world experience. Fatality trends in countries where helmet use has become significant give no reason to believe that helmets have saved even a single life

In 1985 Dr Dorsch, an author of the source report, told an Australian parliamentary committee that the conclusions of the study should be treated with care. She said, "That was a hypothetical procedure based largely on an adult group of cyclists".

See also: [What evidence is there that cycle helmets save lives?](#)

"I know someone whose helmet saved his life"

Many helmet wearers experience crash situations that lead them to believe that their helmet 'saved their life'. But across cyclists as a whole there is no evidence that helmets protect from death or serious injury. Such claims are perhaps an indication that helmeted cyclists are more likely to hit their heads if they crash and that they may be more likely to crash in the first place.

See: ["A helmet saved my life"](#) for a fuller discussion.

References

Dorsch, Woodward and Somers, 1987

Dorsch MM, Woodward AJ, Somers RL, 1987. [Do bicycle safety helmets reduce severity of head injury in real crashes?](#). Accident Analysis and Prevention 1987 Jun;19(3):183-90.

<http://www.cyclehelmets.org/1136.html>

Thompson, Rivara and Thompson, 1989



Thompson RS, Rivara FP, Thompson DC, 1989. [A case control study of the effectiveness of bicycle safety helmets](#). New England Journal of Medicine 1989 v320 n21 p1361-7. [Link includes commentary](#)
<http://www.cyclehelmets.org/1068.html>

Thompson, Rivara and Thompson, 1996

Thompson DC, Rivara FP, Thompson RS., 1996. [Effectiveness of bicycle safety helmets in preventing head injuries: a case-control study](#). JAMA 1996 Dec 25;276(24):1968-73. [Link includes commentary](#)
<http://www.cyclehelmets.org/1159.html>

The Bicycle Helmet Research Foundation (BHRF), an incorporated body with an international membership, exists to undertake, encourage and spread the scientific study of the use of bicycle helmets. Also to consider the effect of the promotion and use of helmets on the perception of cycling in terms of risk and the achievement of wider public health and societal goals.

BHRF strives to provide a resource of best-available factual information to assist the understanding of a complex subject, and one where some of the reasoning may conflict with received opinion. In particular BHRF seeks to provide access to a wider range of information than is commonly made available by those that take a strong helmet promotion stance. It is hoped that this will assist informed judgements about the pros and cons of cycle helmets.

For more information, please visit www.cyclehelmets.org.

Document downloaded 24 Feb 2018. The copyright in this document is owned by the Bicycle Helmet Research Foundation, but it may be reproduced or distributed freely so long as the content is not modified in any way.