

EDITORIAL: Head's up

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A provocative study from UBC has found that provinces with mandatory bicycle helmet laws don't enjoy lower hospitalization rates for cyclists.

To be clear: The study isn't suggesting that wearing a helmet is a bad idea, and we absolutely encourage every cyclist to wear one, whether it makes them look cool or not. (It doesn't, don't worry).

But one thing we can infer from the study: There's strength in numbers. Cities that had higher proportions of cyclists had a lower rate of injuries.

Collisions with vehicles are far less likely when there's a peloton on the move. Also, drivers in cities with high numbers of cyclists are more likely to be used to them and better adjusted to sharing the road.

Far more important (albeit more expensive) is making sure cyclists have safe passage through the city. High-quality bicycle infrastructure that keeps vehicles and bicycles physically separated not only cuts down on injuries, it's likely to encourage more people to take up cycling, thereby reducing the risk for the group as a whole.

It's especially appealing to think how, with the right encouragement and policies, we can get kids into the habit.

The bottom line is, if it's cyclists' safety that we're concerned about, there are better ways to spend our money than chasing down the ones without helmets and issuing fines.

But this doesn't mean we're in favour of tossing out mandatory helmet laws either.

Much like wearing a seatbelt or sitting down in a smoke-free restaurant are (thankfully) the norm now, they only got that way because of the legislation.

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