



E-BIKES

A Guide for Parents

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Electric power-assisted bicycles, commonly called "e-bikes," have become increasingly popular among children, teenagers, and adults. They can provide transportation, recreation, and exercise. They also allow riders to travel farther and faster than traditional bicycles.

Before purchasing an e-bike for a child or teenager, parents should understand both the legal requirements and the safety risks associated with these vehicles.

WHY E-BIKES DESERVE SPECIAL ATTENTION

An e-bike is not simply a bicycle with a battery.

Many e-bikes are capable of maintaining speeds that would be difficult for most riders to achieve on a traditional bicycle. A rider traveling at 20 to 28 miles per hour has less time to react to hazards, requires a greater stopping distance, and may suffer more severe injuries in a crash.

Younger riders have little or no experience operating a vehicle at speeds of 20 to 28 miles per hour in traffic. Parents should recognize that these speeds far exceed the speeds at which many children ride conventional bicycles.

E-bikes can also create risks beyond increased speeds. Motorists may underestimate an e-bike's speed when

pulling from a driveway or turning across traffic. Pedestrians may not hear an approaching e-bike, particularly on sidewalks and shared-use paths. Younger riders may not appreciate the stopping distance of an e-bike. Riders traveling at higher speeds may lose control on gravel, wet pavement, leaves, or other uneven surfaces.

Parents should carefully consider whether a child has the maturity, judgment, and riding experience necessary to safely operate an e-bike.

VIRGINIA'S THREE E-BIKE CLASSES

Virginia law recognizes three classes of electric power-assisted bicycles. (Va. Code § 46.2-100)

Class 1

- Motor assists only while the rider is pedaling.
- Assistance stops at 20 mph.
- No throttle.

Class 2

- Equipped with a throttle that can propel the bicycle without pedaling.
- Assistance stops at 20 mph.

Class 3

- Motor assists only while the rider is pedaling.
- Assistance stops at 28 mph.
- No throttle.
- Must be equipped with a speedometer.

Did You Know?

- Average child riding a bicycle: approximately 8–12 mph
- Adult recreational cyclist: approximately 12–18 mph
- Class 1 and Class 2 e-bikes: motor assistance up to 20 mph
- Class 3 e-bikes: motor assistance up to 28 mph
- Bridgewater currently allows bicycles and e-bikes on sidewalks and shared-use paths
- Riders on sidewalks must yield to pedestrians
- Virginia requires helmets for all operators and passengers of Class 3 e-bikes
- Bridgewater requires helmets for riders age 14 and younger on bicycles, e-bikes, and mopeds
- Riders under age 14 may not operate a Class 3 e-bike unless supervised by an adult age 18 or older
- Before buying an e-bike, consider not only speed and features, but also whether the rider has the maturity and experience to use it safely.



WHO MAY OPERATE AN E-BIKE?

Virginia generally treats e-bikes much like bicycles. Riders do not need a driver's license, vehicle registration, license plates, title, or motor vehicle insurance. (Va. Code § 46.2-904.1)

However, no person under 14 years of age may operate a Class 3 e-bike unless under the immediate supervision of a person who is at least 18 years old. (Va. Code § 46.2-908.1)

HELMET REQUIREMENTS

Virginia law requires every operator and passenger of a Class 3 e-bike to wear a properly fitted bicycle helmet. (Va. Code § 46.2-904.1(G))

In addition, Bridgewater Town Code § 4-505 requires every person 14 years of age or younger to wear a protective helmet whenever riding or being carried on a bicycle, electric power-assisted bicycle, or moped on any highway, sidewalk, or public bicycle path.

Regardless of age or bicycle class, wearing a properly fitted helmet is strongly recommended.

WHERE MAY E-BIKES BE OPERATED?

Generally, e-bikes may be ridden wherever bicycles are permitted, including streets, roads, shoulders, bicycle lanes, and shared-use paths. (Va. Code § 46.2-904.1(F))

Virginia law generally allows bicycles and e-bikes to be used on sidewalks unless prohibited by local ordinance or traffic-control devices. Riders on sidewalks must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and give an audible signal before passing. (Va. Code §§ 46.2-903 and 46.2-904)

The Town of Bridgewater has not prohibited bicycles or e-bikes from operating on sidewalks. However, riders should remember that pedestrians always have priority on sidewalks and shared-use paths. The Town continually monitors safety conditions and may consider

additional regulations if circumstances warrant.

IMPORTANT SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS

Before purchasing an e-bike, parents may wish to ask:

- Has my child demonstrated safe bicycle riding habits?
- Does my child consistently obey traffic laws and signs?
- Is my child mature enough to operate a vehicle capable of traveling up to 20 or 28 mph?
- Will my child wear a helmet every time?
- Will my child ride responsibly around pedestrians?
- Does my child understand that drivers may not see them or may misjudge their speed?

A FINAL THOUGHT

E-bikes can be a safe and enjoyable form of transportation when used responsibly. However, their speed and weight can create risks that are different from those associated with traditional bicycles. Parents are encouraged to consider not only whether a child can operate an e-bike but also whether the child has the judgment and experience to do so safely.

Pedestrians, joggers, dog walkers, cyclists, and e-bike riders all share the Town's sidewalks and shared-use paths. Courtesy, reduced speeds around others, and attention to surroundings help ensure that everyone can enjoy these safely.



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Questions?

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