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Crossing the Road Safely: Why are Children at Risk When They Walk or Ride Bicycles?

Researchers Examine Children's Perception of Moving Objects

Crossing traffic-filled roads presents significant challenges for children. In the U.S. more than 500 children die and 30,000 are injured as pedestrians annually. Child cyclists are also vulnerable, as kids between the ages of 5 and 15 have the highest injury rate per million cycling trips. Motor vehicles are involved in one-third of all bicycle-related brain injuries and in 90% of all fatalities resulting from bicycle crashes. Researchers are beginning to understand the challenges that children face as pedestrians and as cyclists.

- Children need to ride their bikes and be able to walk in their neighborhoods. What can researchers tell parents about helping their children about road safety?
- At road crossings, do children select the same "crossable gaps" in traffic as adults?
- What are the major differences between adults and children when it comes to road crossings?

Researchers who have studied these questions will present their findings at the Society for Research on Child Development meeting in Boston, March 28-31, 2007. The researchers used a bicycling simulator to examine the gaps children and adults accept when bicycling across traffic-filled intersections. This work highlights difficulties children face when attempting to coordinate their own movement with that of the cars.

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