

What to do in an emergency

This is a very basic Emergency Management primer. As a Ride Leader on a bicycle ride, you cannot be expected to be at the scene of a crash on your ride. Riders will be miles apart from each other within a half-hour from the start and any of them (including you) could be involved. You can't be everywhere. This is for informational purposes only, with the hope that if you need information like this on your ride or some future ride you may participate in it will be of help.

This is not intended to supplant any Emergency Management training you may have had. If you have this type of training, you probably don't need this.

On any particular ride, the odds are that no riders will crash. But during the whole season, it is virtually certain that there will be more than one crash occurring on rides. A crash can occur on any ride at almost any time. It may or may not involve any particular rider including the ride leader. The more riders that are aware of basic emergency management, the better off the group will be. This article is written for a rider who is present at a crash but is not a victim of it. No exclusion is meant by the term 'his' or 'him' in this article; it could just as well be read 'her'. It is not meant to teach first aid.

1. Do not panic. Some people can remain composed better than others. Strive to be one of them. Do not allow other people's reactions to affect your thinking. Think for yourself.
2. Assess the situation. If nobody is seriously hurt, the crashed riders may be on their feet before the rest of the group has even stopped. If so, get everybody off the road and do the cleanup and evaluation safely away from traffic. Worry about people first, bikes last.
3. If a rider does not bounce right back up, an initial evaluation of his condition will have to be made on the pavement. If the rider cannot get up, persuade him not to try. Protect the rider from traffic. A 911 call will be necessary. Do not move a rider who cannot move himself until an EMT or doctor has evaluated him. If the rider is ambulatory but obviously hurt, help him off the road.
4. One person should attend to the victim. Everybody else should be close enough to answer if the attendant needs help but far enough back so as not to pressure, embarrass, or concern the victim. It is obviously preferable that the attendant is a member of the group with first aid and or CPR training but that is not always possible. If there are multiple victims, each victim gets one attendant. Of the people not attending to the victims, one person only should be designated to call for help. It is probable somebody in the group has a cell phone. If that person does not know the area that well, have him work the phone but find somebody who does know the area to do the talking. It is likely there is more than one cell phone. If a 911 call is made, it is very important that there is ONLY ONE 911 call. Multiple 911 calls for the same accident may confuse the responders and delay or dilute the response.
5. If a 911 call is made, the caller should be out of earshot of the victim but in contact with the attendant to answer questions from the 911 operator.

6. A 911 call is justified if the victim has lost consciousness (even if he 'comes out of it'), cannot feel or move any extremity, is incoherent, not ambulatory, or is obviously badly hurt.
7. If everybody is OK but a bike is not rideable, you have an inconvenience but not an emergency. Do not call 911. Finish the ride and send somebody back for the stuck rider(s), or call a spouse or acquaintance. Do not accept rides from strangers or allow strangers to take anybody's bike.
8. If a 911 call is made, an incident report is mandatory. There is a form with directions in the ride leader's package from the club. If there is outside involvement without a call being placed, such as a police officer coming across the crash scene while on patrol, it is up to the judgement of the ride leader. A police officer taking statements and names mandates an incident report.

The most common crash injury is 'road rash' with bruises. Often the victim will just keep on riding. Encourage the victim to get appropriate treatment. Do not treat or prescribe treatment.

Handling Injuries

All ride leaders and ride sweeps are strongly encouraged to have a cell phone on their bike during a ride.

What to do if a rider has an accident and is injured:

- Stay calm: You are no help to the others if you are frantic. Pause, take a deep breath, and survey the situation before you act.
- Divert or stop traffic: If the injured rider is in the roadway, have other riders divert or stop traffic until you can determine if the person has a possible neck or back injury. Get all other riders and their bicycles off the road.

Important: If you determine that the person has a possible neck or back injury, divert or hold up traffic until help arrives. Do not move the person.

- Determine if the person is injured seriously enough to require medical attention: The injured rider should get medical attention if he or she:
 - Is bleeding heavily.
 - Has a head injury and lost consciousness even briefly.
 - Can't remember what happened.
 - Has obvious pain when moving an injured limb.
- If the person has no obvious injuries, you still should pay careful attention to determine if the person is confused or disoriented, which could also indicate a head injury.
- If necessary, send someone for help: If there is any question about whether professional medical attention is necessary, call 911 immediately.
- If there is no cellular service and you need to send someone away to make the call, make sure the person who is going can accurately describe where you are.

- If possible, send two riders: one to direct the ambulance to your location (if necessary), and another who can return to the group when 911 has been reached, so you and the others know that help is on the way.

Important: Care for and reassure the injured rider until help arrives. Have the injured rider lay down and keep them as warm and dry as possible. Regardless of the rider's condition, act calmly and speak in reassuring tones. Ask everyone who isn't helping to stand back and give the injured rider and those assisting plenty of room.

Make sure the person's contact information and helmet get into the ambulance: If an injured rider is taken away in an ambulance, someone at the hospital will probably want to examine the helmet to determine the likelihood of head injuries.

Important! Report the incident to the ride coordinator, know the rider's name and contact information, so you can call later to follow up on their condition. It is also helpful if you can obtain the names and contact information of any witnesses and persons that rendered assistance.

Other concerns in the event of a severe accident.

In addition to taking care of the injured rider, you need to be concerned about the other riders and about the injured rider's bike and gear:

Continuing the ride: In some cases, you may need to continue the ride before the injured rider has recovered enough to start riding again or before the ambulance has arrived. For example, if it's evening and you're running out of daylight, you'll need to get the other riders back to the starting point. You shouldn't leave the injured rider alone unless he or she is clearly all right and has a way to get back to the starting point or back home. If the other riders can find their way back to the starting point, you and someone who knows first aid should stay with the injured rider. Otherwise, you should ask for volunteers to stay, again including someone who knows first aid.

What to do with the injured rider's bike and gear: If you need to leave the rider's bike, return for the bike as soon as possible (preferably before nightfall). Alternatively, you may be able to leave the bike at a nearby Police station, fire station, bike shop, or at the home of a local residents.