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Bike Law

Do you know your rights and responsibilities on the road? Here is a summary of Massachusetts' bike law that covers equipment, riding, safety standards, races, violations, and penalties.

For exact requirements, please read the complete text of the laws pertaining to bicyclists and bicycling in Massachusetts. General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [Chapter 85, Section 11B](#).

Your rights

- You may ride your bicycle on any public road, street, or bikeway in the Commonwealth, except limited access or express state highways where signs specifically prohibiting bikes have been posted.
- You may ride on sidewalks outside business districts, unless local laws prohibit sidewalk riding.
- You may use either hand to signal stops and turns.
- You may pass cars on the right.
- If you carry children or other passengers inside an enclosed trailer or other device



that will adequately restrain them and protect their heads in a crash, they need not wear helmets.

- You may hold a bicycle race on any public road or street in the Commonwealth, if you do so in cooperation with a recognized bicycle organization, and if you get approval from the appropriate police department before the race is held.
- You may establish special bike regulations for races by agreement between your bicycle organization and the police.
- You may have as many lights and reflectors on your bike as you wish.

Your responsibilities: you **MUST do these things**

- You must obey all traffic laws and regulations of the Commonwealth.
- You must use hand signals to let people know you plan stop or turn, though this is not required if taking a hand off the handlebars would endanger the bike rider.
- You must give pedestrians the right of way.
- You must give pedestrians an audible signal before overtaking or passing them.
- You may ride two abreast, but must facilitate passing traffic. This means riding single file when faster traffic wants to pass, or staying in the right-most lane on a multi-lane road.
- You must ride astride a regular, permanent seat that is attached to your bicycle.
- You must keep one hand on your handlebars at all times.
- If you are 16 years old or younger, you must wear a helmet that meets U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requirements on any bike, anywhere, at all times. The helmet must fit your head and the chin strap must be fastened.
- You must use a white headlight and red taillight or rear reflector if you are riding anytime from 1/2 hour after sunset until 1/2 hour before sunrise.
- At night, you must wear ankle reflectors if there are no reflectors on your pedals.
- You must notify the police of any accident involving personal injury or property damage over \$100.



Your responsibilities: you **MAY NOT do these things**

- You may not carry a passenger anywhere on your bike except on a regular seat permanently attached to the bike, or to a trailer towed by the bike.
- You may not carry any child between the ages of 1 to 4, or weighing 40 pounds or less, anywhere on a single-passenger bike except in a baby seat attached to the bike. The child must be able to sit upright in the seat and must be held in the seat by a harness or seat belt. Their hands and feet must be out of reach of the wheel spokes.
- You may not carry any child under the age of 1 on your bike, even in a baby seat; this does not preclude carrying them in a trailer.
- You may not use a siren or whistle on your bike to warn pedestrians.
- You may not park your bike on a street, road, bikeway or sidewalk where it will be in other people's way.
- You may not carry anything on your bike unless it is in a basket, rack, bag, or trailer designed for the purpose.
- You may not modify your bike so that your hands are higher than your shoulders when gripping the handlebars.
- You may not alter the fork of your bike to extend it.

Your responsibilities: equipping your bike

- Your bike must have a permanent, regular seat attached to it.
- Your brakes must be good enough to bring you to a stop, from a speed of 15 miles an hour, within 30 feet of braking. This distance assumes a dry, clean, hard, level surface.
- At night, your headlight must emit a white light visible from a distance of at least 500 feet. A generator-powered lamp that shines only when the bike is moving is okay.
- At night, your taillight must be red and must be visible from a distance of at least 600 feet.
- At night, your reflectors must be visible in the low beams of a car's headlights from a distance of at least 600 feet. Reflectors and reflective material on your bike must be visible from the back and sides.

Penalties

- Violations of any of these laws can be punished by a fine of up to \$20. Parents and guardians are responsible for cyclists under the age of 18. The bicycle of anyone under

18 who violates the law can be impounded by the police or town selectmen for up to 15 days.

Motorist Responsibilities (see MGL Chapter 89, Section 2 and Chapter 90, Section 14)

- Motorists and their passengers must check for passing bicyclists before opening their door. Motorists and their passengers can be ticketed and fined up to \$100 for opening car or truck doors into the path of any other traffic, including bicycles and pedestrians.
- Motorists must stay a safe distance to the left of a bicyclist (or any other vehicle) when passing. Motorists are also prohibited from returning to the right until safety clear of the bicyclist.
- Motorists must pass at a safe distance. If the lane is too narrow to pass safely, the motorist must use another lane to pass, or, if that is also unsafe, the motorist must wait until it is safe to pass.
- Motorists are prohibited from making abrupt right turns ("right hooks") at intersections and driveways after passing a cyclist.
- Motorists must yield to oncoming bicyclists when making left turns. The law expressly includes yielding to bicyclists riding to the right of other traffic (e.g., on the shoulder), where they are legally permitted but may be more difficult for motorists to see.
- Motorists may not use the fact that bicyclists were riding to the right of traffic as a legal defense for causing a crash with a bicyclist.

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