

# Safety Rules for Outdoor Recreational Activities

Most outdoor recreational accidents and injuries are preventable if people follow common-sense practices, such as:

- Wear proper safety gear.
- Use equipment that fits and is in good working order.
- Take lessons to learn basic skills.
- Use the buddy system.
- Know and follow basic laws about where an activity can be safely performed.
- Be aware of your surroundings and anticipate potential dangers.
- Perform within your abilities—don't take risks.

Different sports and activities have specific guidelines.

## Riding a Bike

- **Wear a helmet that fits.**  
The helmet should be snug and level on the head. The front of the helmet should not be more than two finger widths above the eyebrows. The strap should be snug, with no more than a finger fitting between the strap and chin.
- **Never ride barefoot or in flip-flops or sandals.**  
Wear shoes that protect your feet and have a firm sole.

- **Make sure your bike is the right size.**  
Sitting on the seat with your hands on the handlebar, you must be able to place the balls of both feet on the ground. Straddling the center bar, you should be able to stand with both feet flat on the ground with about a 1-inch clearance between the crotch and the bar.
- **Ride with a friend.**
- **Always tell someone where you are going and when you will be back.**
- **Obey the same driving rules as cars.**
- **Always ride with traffic, on the right-hand side.**  
Try to use designated bike lanes; do not ride on sidewalks.
- **Pass people on the left and yell "passing on the left" before passing.**
- **Check your bike before riding to ensure the safe condition of tires, chain, and brakes.**
- **Wear clothing so others can see you.**  
During the day, wear light or bright colors. At night, wear light-colored and reflective clothing.
- **Make sure your bike has reflectors and lights for riding after dark.**
- **Make sure pant legs aren't loose or long to avoid getting caught in the chain.**

## Safety Rules for Outdoor Recreational Activities, continued

- Watch out for potential road hazards, such as drain grates, soft shoulders, car doors opening, cars pulling out in traffic.
- Never hitch a ride on a car, truck, or other vehicle.
- Use hand signals to indicate turning and stopping.
- Never wear headphones while riding.
- Only one person should be on a bike at a time.  
No passengers on the handlebars, center bar, or seat.

### Swimming

- Learn to swim.  
Fairfax County Recreation Department, Red Cross, and Boys and Girls Clubs offer swim lessons.
- Know your abilities.  
Swim at a depth that is safe for you; never swim so far out that you are not sure you can make it back safely.
- Swim only in supervised areas where a lifeguard is present.
- Never swim alone; always use the buddy system.
- Obey “No Diving” and “No Swimming” signs.
- Always assess conditions before you jump into a pool, river, or lake.  
How deep is the water? Is there visible debris? Will you land on anyone else? How strong is the current?

- If you get a cramp, don't panic.  
Massage the cramp until the muscle relaxes, or call for help.
- If you are pulled offshore by riptides or undertows, swim toward shore at a 45-degree angle until the current frees you.
- Walk on the pool deck; don't run.
- Don't push anyone into the water.
- Never fake being in trouble or calling for help.  
You can distract rescue personnel from real emergencies.
- Always wear sunscreen.
- Get out of the water as soon as you see or hear a storm.
- Don't swim in the dark.

### Boating

- Wear a personal flotation device (PFD) that fits at all times.  
Make sure there are enough PFDs for everyone on the boat.
- Never use blow-up water wings, toys, rafts, or air mattresses as PFDs.
- Don't overload the boat.
- Know the rules of the waterway.
- Tell someone on shore where you are going and when you'll be back.
- Keep your weight low in the boat; sit, don't stand.
- Always check the weather forecast before going out on the water.