



Rules of the road

The following are important excerpts from the California Vehicle Code relating to the operation and equipping of bicycles.

Bicycle defined (Sec. 231)

Defines bicycle as a device upon which any person may ride, propelled exclusively by human power through a belt, chain, or gears and having one or more wheels. Specifically provides that persons riding bicycles are subject to Vehicle Code provisions specified in Sections 21200 and 21200.5 (see below).

Bicyclist's rights and responsibilities (Sec. 21200)

Every person riding a bicycle upon a street or highway has all the rights and is subject to all the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle, including the provisions of law dealing with driving under the influence of alcoholic beverages or drugs, except those provisions which by their very nature can have no application.

Bicycling under influence of alcohol or drugs (Sec. 21200.5)

Provides that it is unlawful to ride a bicycle upon a street or highway while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage or drug or the combination of alcohol and a drug, punishable by a fine of up to \$250. A person arrested may request a chemical test. If the person is under 21 but over 13 years of age, his or her driving privilege will be suspended for one year or delayed for one year once the person is eligible to drive.

Equipment requirements (Sec. 21201)

- a) No person shall operate a bicycle on a roadway unless it is equipped with a brake which will enable the operator to make one braked wheel skid on dry, level, clean pavement.
- b) No person shall operate on the highway any bicycle equipped with handlebars so raised that the operator must elevate their hands above the level of their shoulders in order to grasp the normal steering grip area.
- c) No person shall operate upon any highway a bicycle which is of such a size as to prevent the operator from safely stopping the bicycle, supporting it in an upright position with at least one foot on the ground, and restarting it in a safe manner.
- d) Every bicycle operated upon any highway during darkness shall be equipped with the following:
 - 1. A lamp emitting a white light which illuminates the highway and is visible from a distance of 300 feet to the front and the sides of the bicycle.
 - 2. A red reflector mounted on the rear of the bicycle and visible from 500 feet to the rear of the bicycle.
 - 3. A white or yellow reflector mounted on each pedal visible 200 feet to the front and rear of the bicycle and a white or red reflector on each side to the rear of the center of the bicycle,

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except bicycles which are equipped with reflectorized tires on the front and the rear need not be equipped with side reflectors. All reflectorized tires must meet DMV requirements.

e) A lamp or lamp combination, emitting a white light, attached to the operator and visible from a distance of 300 feet in front and from the sides of the bicycle, may be used in place of a lamp attached to the bike.

Lane position (Sec. 21202)

a) Any person operating a bicycle upon a roadway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic moving in the same direction at such time shall ride as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway except under any of the following situations:

1. When overtaking and passing another bicycle or motor vehicle proceeding in the same direction.
2. When preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway.
3. When reasonably necessary to avoid conditions (including, but not limited to, fixed or moving objects, vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, animals, surface hazards, or substandard width lanes) that make it unsafe to continue along the right-hand curb or edge. For purposes of this section, a "substandard width lane" is a lane that is too narrow for a bicycle and a vehicle to travel safely side by side within the lane.
4. When approaching a place where a right turn is authorized.

b) Any person operating a bicycle on a one-way street or highway with two or more marked traffic lanes, may ride as near the left-hand curb or edge of such roadway as practicable.

Hitching rides (Sec. 21203)

No person riding upon any motorcycle, motorized bicycle, bicycle, coaster, roller skates, sled, or toy vehicle shall attach the same or themselves to any streetcar or vehicle on the roadway.

Riding on bicycle (Sec. 21204)

a) No person operating a bicycle on a highway shall ride other than on a permanent and regular attached seat.

b) No person operating a bicycle on a highway shall allow anyone to ride as a passenger other than on a separate attached seat. If the passenger is four years old or younger or weighs 40 pounds or less, the seat shall adequately retain the passenger in place and protect him/her from the bicycle's moving parts.

Carrying articles (Sec. 21205)

No person operating a bicycle shall carry any package, bundle, or article which prevents the operator from keeping at least one hand upon the handlebars.

Permitted movements from bicycle lanes (Sec. 21208)

a) Whenever a bicycle lane has been established on a roadway, any person operating a bicycle upon the roadway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic moving in the same direction shall ride in the bicycle lane, except under the following situations:

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1. When overtaking or passing another bicycle, vehicle, or pedestrian within the lane or about to enter the lane if such overtaking and passing cannot be done safely within the lane.
2. When preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway.
3. When necessary to leave the lane to avoid debris or other hazardous conditions.
4. When approaching a place where a right turn is authorized.

b) No operator of a bicycle shall leave a bicycle lane until it can be done safely and then only after giving an appropriate hand signal in the event that any vehicle might be affected by the movement.

Parking (Sec. 21210)

No person shall leave a bicycle lying on its side on any sidewalk, or shall park a bicycle on a sidewalk in any other position, so that there is not an adequate path for pedestrian traffic. Local authorities may prohibit bicycle parking in designated areas of the public highway, provided appropriate signs are erected.

Obstruction of bikeways (Sec. 21211)

No person shall place or park a bicycle or vehicle so as to impede or block the normal and reasonable movement of any bicyclist on a bikeway or bicycle path or trail unless the placement or parking is necessary for safe operation or otherwise in compliance with the law.

Youth helmets (Sec. 21212)

Prohibits persons under 18 from riding or being a passenger on a bicycle without wearing helmets meeting specified standards (ANSI or SNELL). Violations are punishable by a fine of not more than \$25.

Direction of travel (Sec. 21650.1)

A bicycle operated on a roadway or highway shoulder shall be operated in the same direction as vehicles are required to drive upon the roadway.

Bicycling on freeways (Sec. 21960)

a) The Department of Transportation and local authorities may prohibit or restrict the use of freeways or any portion thereof by bicycles.

b) Such prohibitory regulations shall be effective when appropriate signs giving notice thereof are erected upon the freeway and the approaches thereto.

Hand signals (Sec. 22111)

All required signals given by hand and arm shall be given in the following manner:

1. Left turn: hand and arm extended horizontally beyond the side of the bicycle.
2. Right turn: left hand and arm extended upward beyond the side of the bicycle or right hand and arm extended horizontally to the right side of the bicycle.
3. Stop or sudden decrease of speed signal: left hand and arm extended downward beyond the side of the bicycle.

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Toll crossing (Sec. 23330)

Except where a special permit has been obtained from the Department of Transportation, bicycles shall not be permitted on any vehicular crossing, unless the Department by signs indicates that bicycles are permitted upon all or any portion of the vehicular crossing.

Headsets and earplugs (Sec. 27400)

No person operating any vehicle, including a bicycle shall wear any headset covering, or any earplugs in, both ears. There are exceptions for persons operating authorized emergency vehicles, special construction or maintenance equipment and refuse collection equipment, and for any person wearing personal hearing protectors designed to attenuate injurious noise levels and which do not inhibit the wearers' ability to hear a siren or horn from an emergency vehicle or horn from another motor vehicle, and for any person using a prosthetic device which aids the hard of hearing.

License requirement (Sec. 39002)

- a) A city or county may adopt a bicycle licensing ordinance or resolution providing that no resident shall operate any bicycle on any street, road, highway, or other public property within the city of county, unless such bicycle is licensed in accordance with this division.
- b) Any bicycle not licensed under this division may be additionally regulated or licensed pursuant to local ordinance or may be licensed upon request of the owner.
- c) It is illegal for any person to tamper with, destroy, mutilate or alter any license indicia (marking) or registration form or to remove, alter, or mutilate the serial number, or the identifying marks of a licensing agency's identifying symbol on any bicycle frame licensed under the provision of this division.

Throwing substances on highways or adjoining areas (Sec. 23111 & 23112)

No person in any vehicle shall throw or discharge from or upon any road, highway or adjoining area, public or private, any lighted or non-lighted cigarette, cigar, match or any flaming or glowing substance.

No person shall throw or deposit upon a highway any bottle, can garbage, glass, wire, nails, paper or any substance likely to injure or cause damage to traffic using the highway.

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IMPORTANT! Some of the sections of the laws quoted above have been slightly abbreviated or rephrased for clarity. For exact language, refer to the California Vehicle Code. Search online at <http://leginfo.ca.gov/calaw.html>

In addition to these state laws, many communities have local ordinances about bicycling. Check with your local police department about bicycle registration, bicyclist licensing and other regulations (sidewalk riding, etc.) that may apply in your area.

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