All about the Colorado Safety Stop

As of April 2022, Colorado allows bicyclists to perform the "Safety Stop" at intersections. Use this tool to learn about the manuever and how to educate adult and youth bicyclists about it.

What is the Colorado Safety Stop?

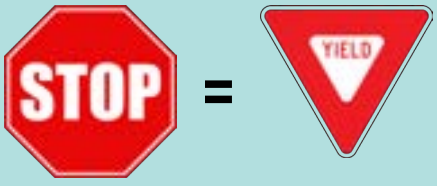
The Safety Stop gives people on bikes and other "low speed conveyances" (see next page) the legal option to ride slowly through stop signs without stopping first, as long as they are yielding right of way to pedestrians and other road users who have the right-of-way. Bicyclists and users of low-speed conveyances may also proceed at red lights after coming to a complete stop, if there is no oncoming traffic.

Bicyclists and low-speed conveyance users can approach intersections at a reasonable speed and choose to apply the Safety Stop or continue to perform a traditional stop at both stop signs and red lights. Only bicyclists ages 15 and over may perform the Safety Stop. Younger riders may do so when they are with a parent or legal guardian.

How does the Safety Stop affect right of way rules?

The principles of Right-of-Way are based on the understanding of who has the right to go first. **At a stop sign**, the traffic that is arriving at the intersection first has priority. **At a stop light**, it's the traffic that has the green light that has priority. **The Safety Stop does not change Colorado's right-of-way rules in any way.** People on bikes may only proceed through stop signs and red lights when no others have the right of way.

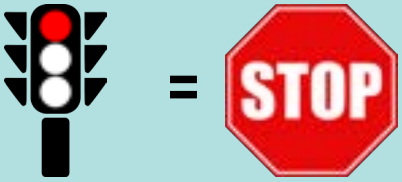
What is legal at intersections in Colorado for bicyclists and users of low-speed conveyances?



Remember, it is always legal for people on a bicycle or low-speed conveyance to come to a complete stop at a stop sign or a red light.

A person on a bicycle or low-speed conveyance may:

- **ride at no more than 10 miles per hour through stop signed intersections** without putting their foot down if they have right of way in the intersection
- **proceed straight or turn right on a red light**, only after coming to a complete stop, yielding to crossing pedestrians and immediate oncoming traffic
- only turn left on **red lights** if proceeding on to a one-way street



Exemptions:

- Youth ages 14 and under may NOT perform the Safety Stop unless accompanied by an adult
- Bicyclists **may NOT perform the Safety Stop at bicyclist-specific stop lights or stop signs**

What is a low-speed conveyance?

Simply put, low-speed conveyances are small profile, low-speed vehicles that people use for transportation and recreation. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Bicycles and electric bicycles
- Electric scooters (not including mopeds)
- "One wheels"
- Wheelchairs

Safety Stop fast facts:

- Intersections are the most dangerous locations for bicyclists. The Safety Stop makes intersections safer by allowing people on bikes and low-speed conveyances to get out of this conflict area more quickly.
- The Safety Stop is also commonly known as the "Idaho Stop," because Idaho legalized the maneuver for bicyclists in 1982. In the year after adopting the maneuver, crashes between bicyclists and drivers fell 14.5% in Idaho, and Boise was shown to be 30-60% safer on a bicycle compared to similarly sized cities [1]
- Crashes between bicyclists and drivers fell 23% at stop sign-controlled intersections in Delaware in the 30 months after the state adopted the Safety Stop compared to 30 months prior to adoption[2]
- When cross-traffic is present, bicyclists generally come to a complete stop to protect themselves[3]
- Bicyclists are acutely aware of their surroundings on the road, and thus very capable of making smart decisions to protect their own safety at an intersection[4]

Bicycle Colorado is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Denver. Our mission is to lead a passionate and growing movement that champions the interests of everyone who rides or wants to ride a bicycle in our state.

Learn more at www.bicyclecolorado.org, and email us at info@bicyclecolorado.org

1 Meggs 2010: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ER7TDmKTSZne7wgTi1T2JEuot1q2a_amMCqKg5PWEWc/edit?usp=sharing
2 Delaware State Police: https://www.bikede.org/delaware-yield-crash-data/#page-content
3 Caldwell, O'Neil, Schwieterman, & Yanocha 2016: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hr8_9EszRHLgFTq3QsiCAjs1KFdlpxLv/view?usp=sharing
4 Leth, Frey & Breznia 2014 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lKvnrk7TQF439Fcx_L3Jbxt_IzvUjfOn/view?usp=sharing

Educating youth on the Colorado Safety Stop

Bicyclists ages 15 and over may perform the Safety Stop. Younger riders may do so when they are with a parent or legal guardian.

Similar to teaching young kids to cross the street only with an adult, the **Safety Stop should be introduced very intentionally and at an appropriate age.**

In addition to considering age, the timeline for introducing the Safety Stop should be based on the unique characteristics, experiences and comfort level of each child and family, much like any child-raising decision.

Age and developmental level

Children on bikes are less visible and less predictable than adult riders. Child experts advise that children ride with an adult until the age of 10 when they are developmentally ready to judge distance and speed and make other critical decisions that can affect their safety alongside drivers.[5] We advise that children ride where they and their guardians feel is most appropriate for their developmental state.

We encourage families to teach and model to elementary and early middle school-aged children the traditional behaviors at a stop sign and red light, and that young bicyclists should follow all signs and signals. Families can discuss the differences between people on bikes and in cars (size, weight, speed, awareness/senses, protection/exposure, etc.), and emphasize that drivers have a great responsibility to look for bicyclists and that bicyclists must still always look out for their own safety.

As youth approach their teens and have started applying laws and navigating more complex situations on the street, we then recommend introducing the Safety Stop, which they can legally perform on their own at age 15. Families should discuss how people on bikes can ride defensively to increase safety and how different laws and behaviors for people on bikes can further increase their safety.

5 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) https://one.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/kidsandbikesafetyweb/index.htm

Riding experience and scaffolded coaching

Children 14 and younger may only perform the Safety Stop if accompanied by an adult. Children should be supported with coaching and practice with an adult when ready to implement the Safety Stop. Here's an example of how families might progress from an initial conversation to performing the Safety Stop with your child:

Introducing the Safety Stop

To start, explain the points below to your child, then have them reteach you what they learned:

- the differences between people in cars and people riding bikes (size, weight, speed, awareness/senses, protection/exposure, etc.)
- why most crashes happen at intersections and the importance of being aware of your surroundings
- how the Safety Stop can reduce crashes when performed safely and legally by letting bicyclists travel through the intersection first in order to avoid drivers
- explain that because of their size and developing brains, children need to have enough maturity and practice before they begin using the Safety Stop

Observation

- Visit intersections controlled by stop signs and red lights and discuss the behaviors and traffic patterns you observe. Identify traffic patterns when it would be safe to apply the Safety Stop.
- Model the Safety Stop for your child watching from a safe distance from the intersections with another adult present.

On-bike practice

- Lead your child through these intersections on your bikes, modeling the traditional stopping behavior at a stop sign and red light while clearly communicating how what you observe informs your decision-making.
- Repeat the step above with your child leading.

Setting expectations

- Set expectations with your child on when they are or are not to use the Safety Stop, i.e. only with an adult, only at stop signs or only at particular intersections.
- As you continue to apply the Safety Stop together or separately, discuss with your child when and why you have each used it or when and why you've chosen to wait at a stop sign or red light. Discuss how each decision has kept you safer.