

Michigan Laws Pertaining to Bicyclists

The following is a summary of the Michigan Compiled Law (MCL), Motor Vehicle Code (MVC) and Administrative Rules pertaining to bicyclists. Local ordinances may not supersede the MVC, MCL or Administrative Rules unless explicitly specified in statute.



1. What is the definition of a bicycle?

MVC 257.4 defines "bicycle" as:

"...a device propelled by human power upon which a person may ride, having either 2 or 3 wheels in a tandem or tricycle arrangement, all of which are over 14 inches in diameter."

2. Where do Michigan laws apply to bicyclists?

Section 257.656(3) of the MVC states:

"The regulations applicable to bicycles under sections 656 to 662 shall apply when a bicycle is operated upon a highway or upon a path set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles, subject to those exceptions stated in sections 656 to 662."

3. Is a bicycle considered a vehicle in Michigan?

No. MCL 257.79 defines a "vehicle" as "every device in, upon, or by which any person or property is or may be transported or drawn upon a highway, except devices exclusively moved by human power..."

4. Does a bicyclist have to obey the same traffic laws as a motorist?

Yes. Section 257.657 of the MVC states:

"Each person riding a bicycle...upon a roadway has all of the rights and is subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle by this chapter, except as to special regulations in this article and except as to the provisions of this chapter which by their nature do not have application." This includes speed limits, stop signs and stop lights.

5. Does a bicyclist have to signal their turns?

Yes. Section 257.648 of the MVC states:

(1) "The operator of a... bicycle upon a highway, before stopping or turning from a direct line, shall first determine that the stopping or turning can be made in safety and shall give a signal as required in this section."

(4) When a person is operating a bicycle and signal is given by means of the hand and arm, the operator shall signal as follows:

(a) "For a left turn... shall extend ... left hand and arm horizontally."

(b) "For a right turn...shall extend ... left hand and arm upward or shall extend ... right hand and arm horizontally."

(c) "To Stop or decrease speed... shall extend ... left hand and arm downward."

6. Does a bicyclist have to ride with the direction of traffic?

Yes. Section 257.634 (1) of the MVC states:

"Upon each roadway of sufficient width, the driver of a vehicle shall drive the vehicle upon the right half of the roadway..." Since a bicyclist has all the rights and is subject to all the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle according to Section 257.657 then they must ride in the right half of the roadway.

7. Where in the right half of the roadway must a bicyclists ride?

Section 257.660a of the MVC states:

A person operating a bicycle upon a highway or street at less than the existing speed of traffic shall ride as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway except as follows:

- (a) "When overtaking and passing another bicycle or any other vehicle proceeding in the same direction."
- (b) "When preparing to turn left."
- (c) "When conditions make the right-hand edge of the roadway unsafe or reasonably unusable by bicycles, including, but not limited to, surface hazards, an uneven roadway surface, drain openings, debris, parked or moving vehicles or bicycles, pedestrians, animals, or other obstacles, or if the lane is too narrow to permit a vehicle to safely overtake and pass a bicycle."
- (d) "When operating a bicycle in a lane in which the traffic is turning right but the individual intends to go straight through the intersection."
- (e) "When operating a bicycle upon a 1-way highway or street that has 2 or more marked traffic lanes, in which case the individual may ride as near the left-hand curb or edge of that roadway as practicable."

8. Can a bicyclist impede traffic?

If the roadway the bicyclist is on has no minimum speed limit, then they are traffic according to the MVC and MCL and therefore cannot be impeding traffic simply because of their speed or the fact that they are riding a bicycle.

MVC Section 257.657 states: "Each person riding a bicycle...upon a roadway has all of the rights and is subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle by this chapter..."

MCL 257.69 states: "... traffic means pedestrians, ridden or herded animals, vehicles, street cars and other conveyances either singly or together while using any highway for purposes of travel."

9. Is it legal to ride between lanes?

No. The MVC does not allow "passing between lanes of traffic," Bicyclists may only pass on the right if there is a dedicate bicycle facility.

10. Must a bicyclist ride on the sidewalk? Is it legal? What about crosswalks?

The MVC does not require bicyclists to ride on the sidewalk and we do not recommend it because of safety hazards to the bicyclist and other sidewalk users. However, Section 257.660c of the MVC states:

- (1) "An individual operating a bicycle upon a sidewalk or a pedestrian crosswalk shall yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and shall give an audible signal before overtaking and passing a pedestrian."
- (2) "An individual shall not operate a bicycle upon a sidewalk or a pedestrian crosswalk if that operation is prohibited by an official traffic control device."
- (3) "An individual lawfully operating a bicycle upon a sidewalk or a pedestrian crosswalk has all of the rights and responsibilities applicable to a pedestrian using that sidewalk or crosswalk."

11. Must a bicyclist ride in a bike lane or a side path?

The MVC does not require bicyclists to use bike lanes, even if present. In 2006 Section 257.660 (3) of the MVC was amended, removing "bicyclists" from being required to use side paths.

12. May bicyclists ride two abreast?

Although riding single-file is often safest, bicyclists are allowed to ride two-abreast on roads; MVC Section 257.660b states:

"Two or more individuals operating bicycles upon a highway or street shall not ride more than 2 abreast except upon a path or portion of the highway or street set aside for the use of bicycles."

13. Is it legal to ride on a limited-access highway?

No. Section 257.679a(1) of the MVC states:

"... nor shall a...bicycle, except as provided in this section...be permitted on a limited access highway in this state. Bicycles shall be permitted on paths constructed separately from the roadway and designated for the exclusive use of bicycles."

14. Does a bicyclist have to wear a helmet?

Although the MVC does not require bicyclists to wear helmets, we strongly recommend wearing one, because it can prevent a vast majority of brain injuries.

15. Does a bicyclist have to use lights?

Yes. MVC Section 257.662 states:

(1) "A bicycle...being operated on a roadway between 1/2 hour after sunset and 1/2 hour before sunrise shall be equipped with a lamp on the front which shall emit a white light visible from a distance of at least 500 feet to the front and with a red reflector on the rear which shall be visible from all distances from 100 feet to 600 feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful lower beams of head lamps on a motor vehicle. A lamp emitting a red light visible from a distance of 500 feet to the rear may be used in addition to the red reflector."

LMB strongly recommends using a rear red light when bicycling in the dark. A bicyclist may only use a "white" light on the front. A "blue" light is reserved for emergency services and may not be used. A "white" light may not be used on the rear of a bicycle. Red is the preferred color for the rear. MVC Section 257.662 (4) and (5) also makes it illegal to sell a bicycle or bike pedal without pedal reflectors, or a bike without "either tires which have reflective sidewalls or with wide-angle prismatic spoke reflectors."

16. Does the law require brakes on bicycles?

Yes. MVC Section 257.662(2) states:

"A bicycle shall be equipped with a brake which will enable the operator to make the braked wheels skid on dry, level, clean pavement."

17. Is it legal to park on the street? Where can bicyclists park on a sidewalk?

MVC Section 257.660d states:

(1) "An individual may park a bicycle on a sidewalk except as prohibited by an official traffic control device.

(2) "An individual shall not park a bicycle on a sidewalk in such a manner that the bicycle impedes the lawful movement of pedestrians or other traffic.

(3) "An individual may park a bicycle on a highway or street at any location where parking is allowed for motor vehicles, may park at any angle to the curb or the edge of the highway, and may park abreast of another bicycle.

(4) "An individual shall not park a bicycle on a highway or street in such a manner as to obstruct the movement of a legally parked motor vehicle.

(5) "Except as otherwise provided in this section, an individual parking a bicycle on a highway or street shall do so in compliance with this act and any local ordinance."

18. Is it legal to use a cell phone while riding a bike?

Only if the cell phone is in hands free mode.

MVC Section 257.661 states:

"A person operating a bicycle...shall not carry any package, bundle, or article that prevents the driver from keeping both hands upon the handlebars of the vehicle."

19. How about texting while cycling?

All Michigan drivers are prohibited from texting while driving under MVC Sec. 257.602.b. Since bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as drivers (MVC Section 257.657), it is therefore also illegal for a bicyclist to text while cycling on Michigan roadways.

20. Is there a three foot passing law in Michigan?

No, but drivers are required to pass at a safe distance!

MVC Section 257.636 states:

"Overtaking and passing of vehicles proceeding in same direction; limitations, exceptions, and special rules; violation as civil infraction.

(1) The following rules shall govern the overtaking and passing of vehicles proceeding in the same direction

(a) The driver of a vehicle overtaking another vehicle proceeding in the same direction shall pass at a safe distance to the left of that vehicle, and when safely clear of the overtaken vehicle shall take up a position as near the right-hand edge of the main travelled portion of the highway as is practicable.

(2) A person who violates this section is responsible for a civil infraction."

21. What other rules must a motorist follow when overtaking or following a bicyclists?

Section 257.627 states:

(1) A person operating a vehicle on a highway shall operate that vehicle at a careful and prudent speed not greater than nor less than is reasonable and proper, having due regard to the traffic, surface, and width of the highway and of any other condition then existing. A person shall not operate a vehicle upon a highway at a speed greater than that which will permit a stop within the assured, clear distance ahead.

Motorists must have their vehicle under control when following bicyclist to be able to react safely if the bicyclist has to make an emergency maneuver.

22. Can you be charged with a DUI while riding your bicycle?

No. Although it would be dangerous to ride a bicycle while intoxicated, a bicycle is not a motor vehicle according to the MVC. DUI applies only to motor vehicles. Other ordinances may apply however, such as being intoxicated and a danger to oneself or another.

23. What are the penalties for a bicyclist violating the MVC?

MVC Section 257.656 states:

(1) "A person who violates any of sections 656 to 661a is responsible for a civil infraction.

(2) "The parent of a child or the guardian of a ward shall not authorize or knowingly permit the child or ward to violate this chapter."

24. If a bicyclist is cited for violating traffic law, does it go on their driving record?

No. The violations are civil infractions, but do not go on a person's driving record. There are no points associated with a bicycle violation.

25. Is it legal to carry another person on your bicycle? What about a child in a child seat?

No, unless the seat is designed to be attached. This would allow for the legal use of a child seat since it is designed to be attached to the bicycle.

MVC Section 257.658 states:

(1) "A person propelling a bicycle ... shall not ride other than upon and astride a permanent and regular seat attached ..."

(2) "A bicycle ... shall not be used to carry more persons at 1 time than the number for which it is designed and equipped."

26. Is it legal to grab onto another vehicle to "hitch" a ride?

No. MVC Section 257.659 states

"A person riding upon a bicycle ... shall not attach the same or himself to a streetcar or vehicle upon a roadway."

27. What is the definition of roadway?

MCL 257.55 states:

"Roadway means that portion of a highway improved, designed or ordinarily used for vehicular travel." Therefore the gutter is not considered part of the roadway.

28. Is there any law against motorists opening their doors into bicyclists?

Administrative Rule R28.1498 Rule 498 (1) states:

"A person shall not open a door of a vehicle in a manner that interferes with or impedes the flow of traffic."

A bicycle would be included under this protection, since it is legally traffic according to MCL 257.69; "... traffic means pedestrians, ridden or herded animals, vehicles, street cars and other conveyances either singly or together using any highway for purposes of travel."

29. Can a motorist park or drive in a bike lane?

No. Administrative Rule R28.1322 Rule 322 states:

- (1) A person shall not operate a vehicle on or across a bicycle lane, except to enter or leave adjacent property.
- (2) A person shall not park a vehicle on a bicycle lane, except where parking is permitted by official signs.
- (3) A person who violates this rule is guilty of a misdemeanor.

30. Does a bicyclist have to carry a driver's license?

No, the law does not require you to carry a driver's license.

We strongly recommend that all bicyclists carry some type of picture ID when riding their bicycle. In case of an emergency law enforcement or safety personnel may need to identify you. If you have health issues of any kind we believe it is critical that you carry identification that identifies you and what your health issues are.



The League of Michigan Bicyclists

12 Things You Should Know About Bicycles, Safety and Crashes

1. Bicycles are legal. Michigan law states bicycles are legal vehicles on the road. Despite the law, some motorists insist that bicycles belong only on sidewalks or should be restricted to paths. The problem: sidewalks and paths don't go everywhere bicyclists need to go. Bicyclists are more visible and safer, particularly at intersections, if they ride in the road.

2. Helmets. Helmets should be worn by children and adults to prevent or reduce injuries and save lives. Wearing a helmet, though, will not prevent a crash. In the Netherlands, few cyclists wear helmets, yet the fatality rate is 1/5 of the U.S. because Dutch motorists respect the rights of bicyclists.

3. Accident vs. crash. The word "accident" means the mishap was unavoidable, and no one was to blame. Traffic safety experts say most crashes involving motorists and bicyclists are avoidable and can be prevented through better training and being alert. "Crash, collision or mishap" are more accurate than "accident."

4. Typical crashes involving child bicyclists: Most are caused by the bicyclists, such as riding out of a residential driveway, alley or side street without first looking, failing to stop at stop signs or traffic lights and making left turns without first looking over the shoulder for approaching traffic and signaling. With training, these crashes can be prevented.

5. Typical crashes involving adult bicyclists: Most are caused by motorists, such as failing to yield when making turns in front of bicyclists and failing to yield at stop signs and traffic lights. The exception: bicyclists riding against the flow of traffic. By sharing the road, observing traffic laws and being patient and courteous, these crashes can be prevented by motorists and bicyclists.

6. Speed matters. Excessive speed by motorists is a leading cause of crashes and a major factor in the seriousness of a motorist-bicyclist crash. The higher the speed of the motor vehicle the greater likelihood a bicyclist will be killed.

7. Distractions. Distractions and drowsiness make drivers as crash-prone as driving drunk. While drunk driving gets reported, other risky actions -- using a cell phone, eating, doing make-up, using a hand-held computer or a music player -- are rarely reported. A distraction of only three seconds can cause a collision.



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8. "I didn't see him." It's a common response by motorists after a crash and often means a driver was not paying attention to the road and not alert to the presence of bicyclists. Claiming not to see a bicyclist, pedestrian or another motorist is not a valid excuse to avoid being charged with a traffic offense.

9. Getting hit from behind. Many bicyclists do not ride on roads because of their fear of getting hit from behind by a car. This is a relatively uncommon crash, but it can occur especially on rural roads with poor visibility and at night. For a bicyclist to be safe, a motorist should allow at least three feet of space when passing, more if the car is traveling faster.

10. The bicyclists' safety mantra: Bicyclists fare best when they act and are treated like other vehicles on the road. Bicyclists, just like motorists, have fewer crashes when they obey traffic laws and follow driving conventions -- observing the right-of-way, being in the proper lane and intersection positions, signaling and being predictable.

11 Bicyclists' typical traffic violations: Bicyclists riding against the flow of traffic, failing to stop at stop signs and traffic lights and impeding normal traffic by riding side-by-side or more than two abreast. Riding more than two abreast is prohibited by law, except on paths or roadways designated for exclusive bike use.

12. No justification for intimidation. Although bicyclists' traffic violations disturb and even anger some motorists, they are usually not the major causes of crashes with motor vehicles. Nonetheless, motorists have no right to intimidate bicyclists for riding in the road, where they have a legal right to be. Everyone gets where they're going safely when everyone shares the road and shows patience and courtesy.

(For more information on bicycling safety and other bicycling issues, visit our website at www.lmb.org or contact LMB @ office@lmb.org or toll free at 888-642-4537 [517-334-9100].)