

Press Release

Distraction on the bike

Flying blind on two wheels

- Cell phone use increases crash risk
- Longer reaction and braking times
- Accident researchers: Focus your attention on traffic

Hardly any aspect of life is not influenced by cell phone use. It's not just in the car that more and more people are reaching for their phone while driving, it's also almost always at the ready when cycling – for making calls, listening to music, texting, or navigating. DEKRA accident researchers warn that distraction increases the risk of a crash.

“We have more and more cyclists, more traffic on roads and paths and a higher speed level due to electric drives – and unfortunately also rising accident numbers”, says Luis Ancona, accident researcher at DEKRA. “For cyclists, it's important to stay focused while riding and not be distracted.”

Impaired perception

“We know that using a smartphone while cycling is associated with many risks”, explains Ancona. “In particular, visual perception of traffic is severely impaired by looking at the smartphone. Acoustic signals are also less noticeable, reaction and braking times are longer, and it becomes much more difficult to stay in your own lane. This can lead to conflicts and accidents with oncoming cyclists, especially on narrow cycle lanes or paths.”

According to a German research project conducted by the Federal Highway Research Institute in 2022, around 10 to 17 percent of cyclists use their cell phone at least once during a ride, with younger, male cyclists using it particularly often.

When driving, such distractions lead to a 50 percent higher crash risk, according to a study by a German insurer. “Although these results cannot be transferred one-to-one to cycling, there are indications that the risk of crashes increases significantly here too”, says the accident expert.

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“Anything that takes your attention away from traffic increases the risk of a crash”, emphasizes Ancona. “If you look at your cell phone for just two seconds at 25 km/h (15 mph), you're flying blind for 14 meters (46 ft) in that time. If, for example, a pedestrian steps into your path, there is no time to react, and a crash is inevitable.”

Cyclists who make phone calls with a cell phone in their hand are severely handicapped. “With only one hand on the handlebars, swerving or emergency braking becomes much more difficult. That's why both hands should always be on the handlebars. The only exceptions should be when indicating the direction of travel with a hand signal when turning or changing lanes”, says Ancona.

Cycling with headphones can be dangerous

The accident researcher also warns cyclists not to listen to their favorite hits with headphones or headsets in both ears. “I consider this very risky”, says the DEKRA accident researcher. “It's easy to miss important acoustic information that is indispensable in traffic, especially in the city, such as the sound of an approaching car.”

He calls for focusing one's full attention on traffic. If you want to use your smartphone, you should stop. The accident researchers also believe that making phone calls with a headset is not without risk. Ancona: “A conversation can be very distracting and take your attention away. In critical situations, even that can be too much.”

Tips for safe cycling

- Concentrate on what is happening on the road and avoid secondary activities.
- If you want to use your cell phone, you should stop.
- Safe riding means: both hands on the handlebars. Otherwise riding, swerving, or braking becomes much more difficult.
- Even with the smartphone in a holder on the handlebars, you should only ever look at it very briefly.
- Your hearing must not be impaired by headphones or a headset. Important signals or noises are easily drowned out.
- Talking on the phone with headphones or a headset can also be very distracting from what is happening on the road. It is better to stop when using the phone, especially for intense or longer conversations.
- When cycling, always protect your head and wear a helmet.

Picture Caption

When riding a bike, full attention should be paid to traffic.

About DEKRA

DEKRA was originally founded in 1925 to ensure road safety through vehicle inspection. With a much wider scope today, DEKRA is the world's largest independent non-listed expert organization in the testing, inspection, and certification sector. As a global provider of comprehensive services and solutions, we help our customers improve their safety, security, and sustainability outcomes. In 2023, DEKRA generated revenue of EUR 4.1 billion. The company currently employs around 49,000 people who offer qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries on five continents. With a platinum rating from EcoVadis, DEKRA is now in the top one percent of sustainable businesses ranked.