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As mercury soars, helmets disappear

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Close to a third of all accidents in the city involve two-wheelers. Photo: M. Vedhan

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Despite risks, many prefer to ride without protective gear in the sweltering heat

The soaring summer heat is forcing many motorists to skip wearing their helmets, a situation that is highly risky.

Doctors warn the summer heat considerably impacts concentration levels, thereby the need for helmets is more pronounced.

Out of 250 motorists observed by this reporter from 2.30 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Kamarajar Salai, Sardar Patel Road and Santhome, on Sunday, only around 80 riders sported helmets. Almost none of the pillion riders had protective head gear.

Close to a third of all accidents in the city involve two-wheelers.

According to statistics available with the State transport authority, of the 9,705 accidents that took place last year, 3,125 were two-wheeler accidents. Of these, 350 were fatal accidents, resulting in the death of 353.

Speaking on the dangers of driving without a helmet in the summer, neurosurgeon K. Ganapathy said, "When it is extremely hot, the risks are higher if one does not wear a helmet. With such high heat, it is difficult to concentrate on driving, which means there is a higher likelihood of an accident."

Despite the risks, most two-wheeler riders prefer to leave their helmets at home because it is too hot to wear them, especially in the afternoon.

"It is so much easier to ride without wearing a helmet. With the mercury touching 40 degrees Celsius, the heat is unbearable. If I ride with a helmet, it makes it even more difficult since the sweat streams into my eyes when I'm riding," said Suresh from Virugambakkam.

"On a daily basis, I travel around 100 kilometers on my motorbike. When it is cooler, I always wear a helmet, but in the heat, it is difficult to wear one. Previously, I would stop every half an hour, while riding, and remove my helmet to try and cool down, but this year, I decided to stop wearing one," said marketing executive Karunakaran.

Even the traffic police have decided to give motorists a little leeway.

According to traffic policemen who were on duty at Santhome, Adyar and Guindy, although donning a helmet is the rule, since it is so hot, they do not penalise riders for not wearing a helmet.

Additional commissioner of police, Karuna Sagar, however, denied this saying regular enforcement is in place for the helmet rule.

Enforcement of the helmet rule has come in to focus ever since the Supreme Court, in July 2010, issued a directive ordering all bike manufacturers to sell helmets with their two-wheelers.

The police have taken up a drive to enforce helmets more strictly through various awareness programmes.

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