

# UNDERSTANDING ELECTRIC BIKES (E-BIKES) IN CALIFORNIA

## IMPORTANT FOR PARENTS AND CONSUMERS TO KNOW - ELECTRIC BICYCLES AND ELECTRIC MOUNTAIN BIKES (E-MTBS) VS ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLES

There are significant differences between electric bicycles and electric motorcycles, although both are often called “e-bikes.” Understanding the differences and being informed is important when purchasing either an electric bicycle, an e-MTB, or an electric motorcycle for your child or teenager.

### ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLES

Despite common understanding and everyday use of the term “e-bike”, electric motorcycles are just that: motorcycles. They require a motorcycle license and insurance for use on streets and roads.

Additionally, many trails are closed to electric motorcycles. Riders will need to be in a designated OHV (off highway vehicle) area or on a designated motorized trail to legally ride them.

- If your child or teenager intends to ride off-road, remember that Class 1 electric bicycles and e-MTBs are generally the only class allowed on non-motorized trails, i.e. mountain bike trails.
- Not all non-motorized trails allow Class 1 electric bicycles and e-MTBs. Be certain you and your child or teenager understand what is allowed on your local trails.
- Electric motorcycles are only allowed on trails open to motorized use or in designated OHV (off highway vehicle) areas.
- Should you purchase your child or teenager an electric motorcycle:
  - They may be in violation of the law depending on where they choose to ride it.
  - Due to the high speeds electric motorcycles are capable of, additional safety risks should be considered.
  - Financial risks should be considered. Liability, tickets, impoundment fees and more, are possible in situations of irresponsible or illegal use.

### ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLES ON STREETS AND ROADWAYS

Electric motorcycles (or motor-driven cycles) are not lawful to operate on any public street or road unless registered as a motor vehicle and equipped with front & rear lights, turn signals, mirrors, a horn, and a license plate & light. An electric moped, motor-driven cycle, or motorcycle is defined as any vehicle with motor power greater than 750 watts, or capable of speeds greater than 20 mph on motor power (throttle) alone when measured in the ungoverned (unlocked) mode, or when using pedals, assisted by a motor.

**For more information about electric bicycle safety and responsible use on trails, visit:**

Trails are Common Ground: e-MTB Resources

The State of California’s resource: Motorcycles and Similar Vehicles



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[TrailsAreCommonGround.org](https://TrailsAreCommonGround.org)



## ELECTRIC BICYCLES

An electric bicycle or e-MTB, is a bicycle equipped with fully operable pedals and an electric motor of less than 750 watts. Three classes of electric bicycles/e-MTBs have been established:

- **Class 1:** A low speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle equipped with a motor which provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance when a speed of 20 mph is reached.
- **Class 2:** A low speed throttle-assisted electric bicycle equipped with a motor used exclusively to propel the bicycle and NOT capable of providing assistance when a speed of 20 mph is reached.
- **Class 3:** A low speed pedal-assisted electric bicycle equipped with a speedometer, and a motor which provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and ceases to provide assistance when a speed of 28 mph is reached.

Electric bicycles are regulated like bicycles. The same rules of the road apply to both electric bicycles and human-powered bicycles. Electric bicycles are not subject to the registration, licensing, or insurance requirements that apply to motor vehicles.

Local governments and land managers have the authority to restrict the use of all classes of electric bicycles. When in doubt, check your local rules and regulations to determine where electric bicycles are allowed on both pavement and natural surfaces.

All electric bicycles that fall within the above class definitions are exempt from the motor vehicle financial responsibility, drivers license, and license plate requirements (CVC §24016).

Additionally, the operator of a Class 3 electric bicycle:

- Must be 16 years old or older.
- Must wear a bicycle safety helmet.
- Must not transport passengers.
- May ride an electric bicycle in a bicycle lane if authorized by local authority or ordinance.

In California, all three classes of electric bicycles are allowed on bicycle paths or trails, bikeways, bicycle lanes, equestrian trails, or hiking or recreational trails, unless a local authority with jurisdiction prohibits the operation of any class of electric bicycle.

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