

Biking to a Better World

Gemma Alexander

With everything else that's going on, you probably didn't even notice that June 3 was [World Bicycle Day](#).

And who can blame you? No one could argue that celebrating the bicycle should draw attention away from the major issues of pandemic and institutional racism that are rocking the world right now. But the humble bicycle has a small role to play in the big current issues.

Believe it or not, bicycles contribute to both public health and equity in more ways than one.

World Bicycle Day

The bicycle is 200 years old, but World Bicycle Day is one of the United Nations' newest International Days.

The UN establishes International Days as educational and advocacy tools supporting the issues the UN works on. June 3 was designated World Bicycle Day in 2018. In the United States, we already have National Bike Month in May. The popular National Bike to Work Day is usually on the third Friday of May. Since hardly anyone was going to work in May this year, those events have been [moved to September](#).

Biking for Health

[Maintaining social distance](#) when [biking to work](#) is easier than on public transportation. (And the more people bike, the safer public transportation will be for those who continue to use it.) Of course, cars are the lowest risk mode of transportation to avoid exposure to COVID, but they [increase the risk](#) of chronic illnesses.

Biking for Climate

Biking is not just healthier for the person who rides.

[Air pollution](#) contributes to the deaths of 200,000 Americans every year, and vehicle emissions are a leading [contributor](#) to climate change, which is already [linked to thousands of deaths](#) each year. The typical passenger vehicle emits [4.6 metric tons](#) of carbon dioxide each year, or about 271 grams of CO₂ per passenger-kilometer. Bicycles, on the other hand, produce only [21 grams of CO₂](#) per kilometer, mostly through the food-calories a cyclist burns (based on an average European diet).

Cycling reduces your [transportation carbon footprint](#) to one-tenth that of driving a car.

Biking for Equity

Around the world, bicycles can contribute directly to equity by expanding access to [education](#), [health care](#), and economic opportunities. This last benefit is one that we can even see here in the U.S. Although modern bike lanes can be [expensive](#), studies show that even in U.S. cities, they can increase [access to employment](#) and have a net [positive economic](#) impact.

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Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).



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