



Number 298

June 2005

SAFETY BELT USE IMPACTS HOSPITALIZATION OUTCOMES

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) conducts a national telephone survey approximately every two years to monitor the public's attitudes, knowledge, and self-reported behavior regarding safety belts, child safety seats, air bags, crash injury experience, and emergency medical services (EMS). The 2003 survey consisted of two questionnaires, each administered to a randomly selected sample of about 6,000 persons age 16 and older. Interviewing ran from January 8, 2003 to March 30, 2003. Volume 4 presents findings on crash injury experience and emergency medical services.

Motor Vehicle Crash Injuries

- More than one-in-four persons (27.4%) ages 16 and older reported having been injured at some time in the past in a vehicle crash where they required medical attention. Almost one-in-twenty (4.5% of the total population) were unable to resume some of their normal activities even a year after the crash.
- Six percent of those injured said the crash occurred within the past year, and 30% said they had a crash-related injury in the past five years.
- Almost two-fifths (39%) of all persons age 16 and older who sustained crash-related injuries in the past year were in the 16-to-24 age group.
- About half (49%) of persons ever injured in a crash were transported from the crash scene via ambulance (in cases where a respondent was injured in multiple crashes, data were collected only for the most recent crash). More than three-quarters (76%) of injured persons were treated in a hospital emergency room, and about one-fourth (24%) of injured persons were hospitalized. Of those hospitalized, 40% were hospitalized for more than 5 days.
- Use of safety belts at the time of the crash made a significant difference in hospitalization outcomes. One person in six (17%) who was wearing a safety belt at the time of the crash was hospitalized compared to one person in three (32%) who was not wearing a safety belt at the time of the crash.
- Of those ever injured in a crash, 59% were unable to perform some of their normal activities for at least a week either in the most recent crash (56%) or an earlier crash (3%).

Concerns About Stopping at a Crash Scene

- Forty-three percent of the public said they would have no concerns about stopping to help if they saw a crash where no one was at the scene to help. This is a substantial decrease from the numbers obtained by the three surveys conducted prior to 2000 (all over 50%), and a further drop from the 2000 figure (46%). Conversely, from 1994 to 2003, the public showed increased concern about personal safety (from 15% to 21%) and about their ability to help the victim (from 12% to 19%).
- Males (50%) were more likely to express no concerns about stopping to help than were females (37%). Females were more concerned than males about personal safety (25% vs 16%) and their ability to help the victim (22% vs 16%).
- After being asked about concerns they might have about stopping to help at a crash site, more than three-in-five (61%) said, in response to a follow-up question, that they definitely would stop, and an additional three-in-ten (29%) said they probably would stop. Males (68%) were more likely than females (55%) to say they definitely would stop.
- If the situation was too dangerous to stop and provide assistance, almost everyone said they definitely (87%) or probably (11%) would call for help from the nearest phone.

Wireless Phones

- More than two-thirds of drivers (68%) reported that they usually had a wireless phone of some type in the vehicle with them when they drove.
- Almost three-quarters of those who usually carried a wireless phone with them while driving said that they kept the phone turned on to receive calls during all (57%) or most (17%) trips. Among those who kept the phone turned on so that calls could be received, 72 percent said that they always (41%) or usually (31%) answered incoming calls when driving.
- Although most drivers with wireless phones said they had it turned on when they drove, and most of those said they would answer the phone while driving, relatively few reported talking on the phone during most trips. Only 13 percent of drivers who usually carried a wireless phone with them said they talked on the phone while driving during most (8%) or all (5%) trips.
- Drivers reported that they tended to hold the phone by hand (60%) rather than use a phone hands free (39%) if they talked on the phone while driving. About half (47%) who tended to use the phone hands free said they also sometimes held the phone by hand when driving and talking on the phone.

- When making calls while driving, 33% said they tended to dial the phone while driving and 41% said they tended to dial during a temporary stop. Fewer drivers (23%) said they tended to pull over and stop before dialing the phone.
- Eleven percent of drivers who usually had a wireless phone with them said they had to take quick action while talking on the phone during the past year to avoid another vehicle or some other object, and 4% had to take quick action to move back onto the roadway.

Emergency Medical Services

- Almost half (46%) of the public reported that they had called "9-1-1" or another emergency number for help some time in the past. Most often, they were calling for an ambulance (49%).
- Most of the public believed that if they called for an ambulance, it would arrive either within 5 minutes (41%) or 6-to-10 minutes (28%). About two-thirds of the public (68%) were "very confident" the ambulance or other emergency workers would know what to do and an additional 27% were "somewhat confident."
- About one-third of persons (32%) had taken some form of emergency or first aid training in the past five years. About two-fifths of these (39%) received training through work and about one-fifth (19%) received training through school.
- Respondents were asked how interested they would be in taking a course that would give them training to assist crash victims, assuming it was low cost and convenient. Two-thirds (66%) said they would be very interested (25%) or somewhat interested (41%).

HOW TO ORDER

For a copy of *2003 Motor Vehicle Occupant Safety Survey (Volume IV: Crash Injury and Emergency Medical Services Report)* write to the Office of Research and Technology, NHTSA, NHT-130, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington DC 20590 or send a fax to (202) 366-7096 or download www.nhtsa.dot.gov

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway
Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W. NHT-130
Washington, DC 20590

Traffic Tech is a publication to disseminate information about traffic safety programs, including evaluations, innovative programs, and new publications. Feel free to copy it as you wish.

If you would like to receive a copy, contact Patty Ellison-Potter, Ph.D., Editor, fax (202)366-7096,
e-mail: Patricia.Ellison-Potter@nhtsa.dot.gov

