

# Injury Prevention – Motor Vehicle Safety

Motor vehicle crashes are among the leading causes of injury death and hospitalization in Colorado. Each year, more than 300 motor vehicle occupants (drivers or passengers) die in motor vehicle crashes and nearly 2,500 are hospitalized for nonfatal injuries.

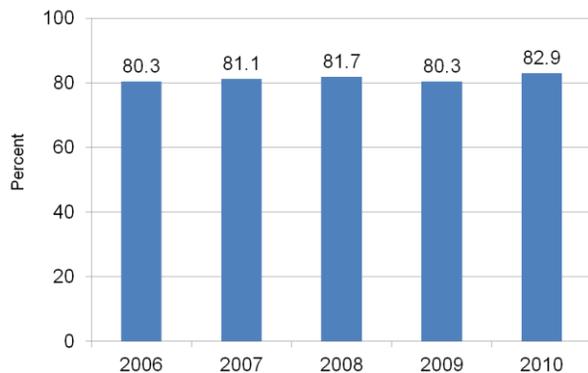
## Why is this important?

Hundreds of Coloradans are killed each year in preventable motor vehicle crashes. In addition to the human toll, deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes have high societal costs. Research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration indicates motor vehicle crash deaths and injuries annually result in medical costs of more than \$103 million in Colorado.

Colorado can reduce the number of injuries and deaths and their associated costs by implementing effective programs and policies.

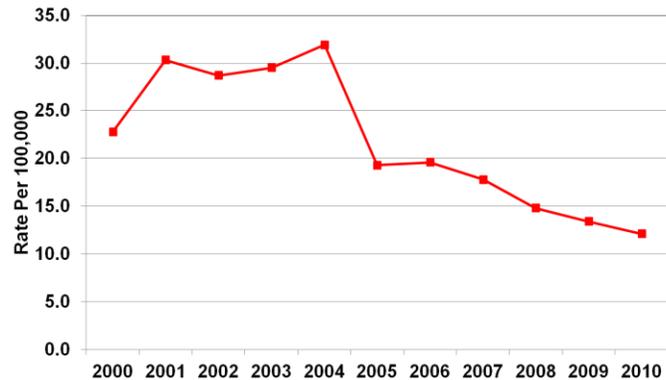
## Where are we?

Colorado seat belt usage annual estimates, 2006-2010



Source: Colorado Department of Transportation

Motor vehicle death rates\* of Colorado teens aged 15-19



\*Rates are per 100,000 teens ages 15-19  
Source: Vital Statistics, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

## Where do we want to be?

By 2016,

- Decrease teen motor vehicle death rates to 10.5 per 100,000 teens ages 15-19; and
- Increase the use of seat belts from 82.1 percent to 90 percent.

## ★ Colorado's 10 Winnable Battles ★

Clean Air   Clean Water   Infectious Disease Prevention   Injury Prevention  
Mental Health and Substance Abuse   Obesity   Oral Health   Safe Food   Tobacco   Unintended Pregnancy

## What is being done?

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Injury, Suicide and Violence Prevention Unit has a five-year grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to promote evidence-based policy strategies proven to save lives, reduce injury and reduce public costs. In order to be in line with national best practices, Colorado should consider the following:

1. Implementing a primary enforcement seatbelt law that covers all seating positions and all ages.
2. Strengthening and simplifying the existing graduated drivers licensing (GDL) law to help young drivers gain experience under lower-risk conditions:
  - Increase the minimum age to receive a learner's permit from 15 to 16.
  - Increase the minimum age to receive an intermediate license from 16 to 17.
  - Expand the restricted driving hours for an intermediate license to 10 p.m. through 5 a.m.

## High-risk groups

Deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes disproportionately affect younger (ages 15-24) and older (ages 65+) adults.

People who choose not to wear a seatbelt while riding in a vehicle are at higher risk of injury and death in a motor vehicle crash. Adults ages 18-34 are less likely to wear seatbelts than adults 35 or older. Men are 10 percent less likely to wear seatbelts than women. In Colorado, truck drivers are less likely to wear seatbelts than drivers of other types of vehicles. Additionally, adults who live in rural areas of Colorado have lower seatbelt use rates than those living in urban or suburban areas.

## Underlying causes

Two factors contributing to the high motor vehicle crash rates for young drivers are inexperience and risk-taking. A recommended intervention to address this problem is to strengthen graduated driver licensing laws. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety estimates teen motor vehicle deaths can be reduced by 34 percent if Colorado increases the driving age to 17 and expands the curfew for teen drivers.

Lack of seatbelt use is an underlying cause for many motor vehicle injuries and deaths. Seatbelt use is the most effective way to save lives and reduce injuries in a crash. Increasing Colorado's overall seatbelt use rate to 90 percent would save an estimated \$16.4 million annually in reduced medical costs for hospitalizations resulting from motor vehicle-related injuries.

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