

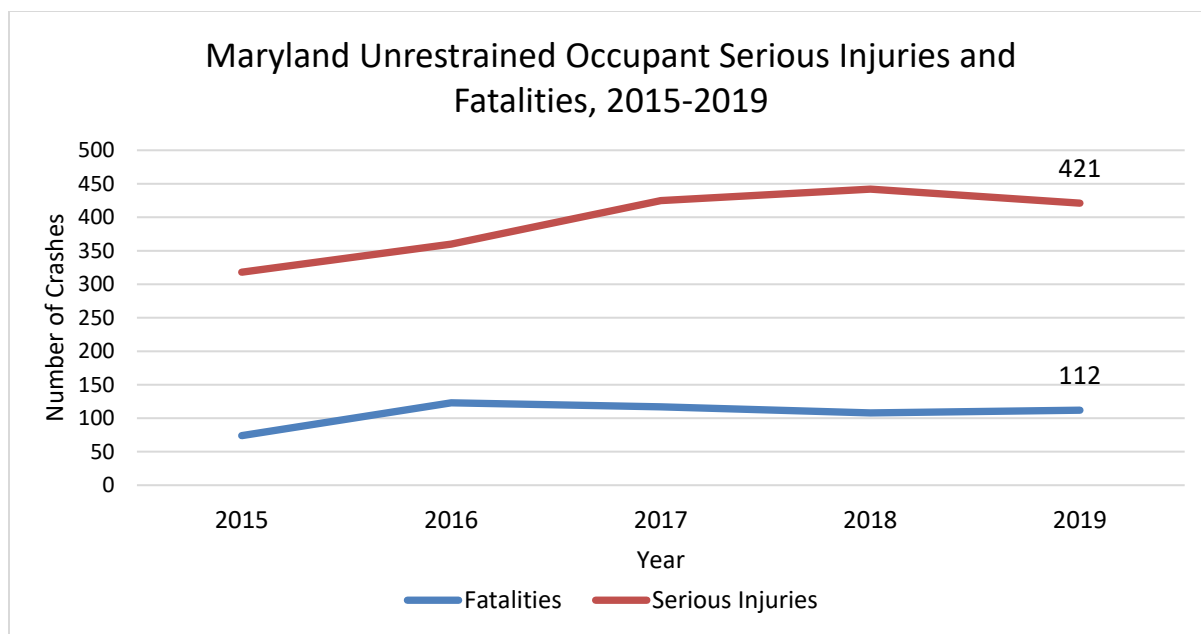
## OCCUPANT PROTECTION PROGRAM AREA BRIEF

### BACKGROUND

#### WHY WE ENFORCE MARYLAND'S SEAT BELT LAWS

- We all pay for the “personal freedom” of those who don’t wear seat belts. The higher health care and higher insurance costs that result from unbuckled crash victims get passed along to everyone.
  - For example, hospital care costs for an unbelted crash victim are 50 percent higher than those for a belted crash victim. Society bears 85 percent of those costs, not the individual drivers involved.
  - Hospital charges paid by the government result in higher health care costs for everyone.
- Apart from the economic impact, unrestrained occupants of vehicles become deadly projectiles in a crash, injuring others as they are thrown around inside the vehicle—and, in many cases, ejected through a window.
- If a driver is unbuckled, 70 percent of the time the children in that vehicle will not be buckled either.
  - A child unrestrained in a 30 MPH crash is like a child dropped from a third story window, and that force is even greater for an adult.
  - Adults who don’t buckle up are sending a deadly message to children that it’s okay not to use seat belts.
- While car and booster seat usage rates are not quantified in Maryland, misuse rates can be summarized through car seat inspection forms. In 2019, summary forms of car seat inspections showed an overall statewide misuse rate of 80 percent. This includes multiple errors, including: wrong seat for the child, installed incorrectly, harnessed incorrectly or using a crashed, broken, recalled or expired seat.

### THE FACTS

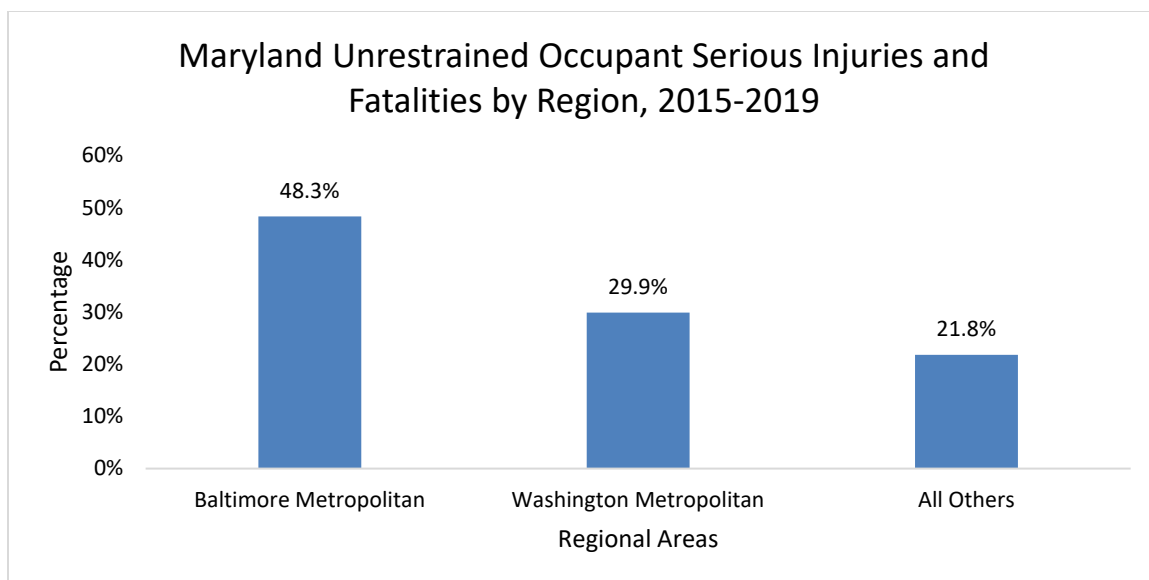


- Motor vehicle crashes are a huge threat to public health.** Motor vehicle crashes continue to be a leading cause of death in the United States<sup>1</sup>. In 2018, approximately 6.7 million crashes were reported; approximately 29 percent resulted in an injury or fatality<sup>2</sup>.
- The number of seriously injured unbelted motor vehicle occupants is increasing.** In 2019, more than 400 unbelted passenger vehicle occupants were seriously injured in a motor vehicle crash. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of unbelted passenger vehicle occupants seriously injured in crashes has increased by 32 percent.
- The number of fatally injured unbelted occupants has remained relatively steady.** In 2019, there were 112 unrestrained occupants killed in crashes. These unbelted motor vehicle occupants represented one third of all vehicle occupants fatally injured in crashes statewide and 21 percent of all statewide traffic fatalities (including pedestrians).
- Metropolitan areas have the highest concentration of crashes involving unbelted motor vehicle occupants<sup>3</sup>.** From 2015 to 2019, seriously and fatally injured unbelted occupants were mostly concentrated in Baltimore and Prince George's Counties. More than three-fourths of all seriously and fatally injured unbelted occupants were involved in crashes in metropolitan areas.

<sup>1</sup> CDC National Vital Statistics Reports – 10 Leading Causes of Death

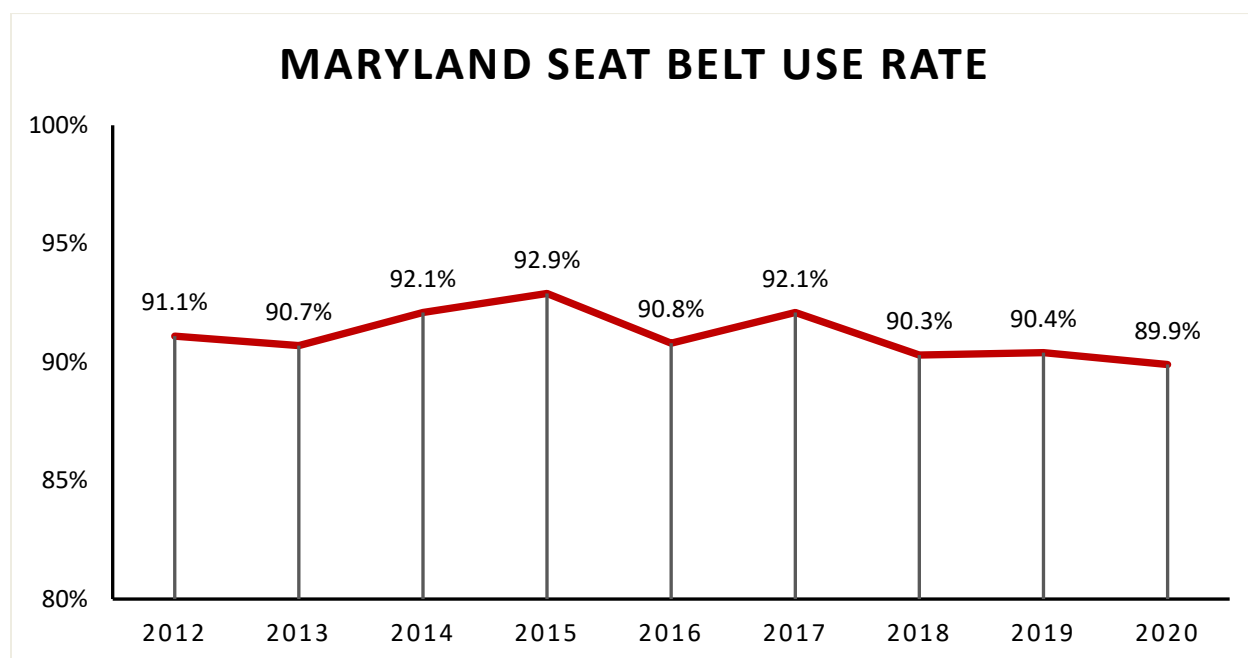
<sup>2</sup> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Traffic Safety Facts Annual Report Tables, National Statistics 2010-2018

<sup>3</sup> Baltimore Metropolitan area is comprised of Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, Howard and Queen Anne's Counties, and Baltimore City, as designated by the Baltimore Metropolitan Council. The Washington Metropolitan Area is defined as Charles, Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties, as designated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.



## STATEWIDE SEAT BELT USE

- In 2020, the observed statewide seat belt use in Maryland was 89.9%, a decrease of 0.5% from the observed rate of 90.4% in 2019.
- The historic change in the statewide seat belt use rate is depicted in the graph below:



## MARYLAND'S OCCUPANT PROTECTION LAWS

### MARYLAND ADULT SEAT BELT LAWS

- Adult occupants 16 and older must be correctly buckled up in the front outboard and back seat positions. Adults in the front outboard seating positions are primary enforcement and back seat adults are secondary enforcement.
- A person may not operate a motor vehicle unless everyone seated in the vehicle is restrained by a seat belt or a child safety seat.
- If anyone is unrestrained in a motor vehicle, each violator will be ticketed and fined \$50. For example, if the driver and two passengers, one in the front seat and one in the backseat, are unrestrained, they will each receive a ticket and \$50 fine.
- In the case where neither the driver, nor any child under the age of 16 are buckled up, the driver will receive a ticket for both. All citations are \$83 (including court costs).

#### **Who is covered by the law?**

- As of October 1, 2013, the law covers all seated occupants in a motor vehicle including front and rear seats.

#### **What vehicles are covered under the law?**

- Registered in Maryland as Class A (passenger), Class E (truck), Class F (truck tractor), Class M (multipurpose), or Class P (passenger bus) vehicles.
- The same types of vehicles registered in another state.

#### **Who is not covered under the law?**

- Those who have a written certificate from their doctor stating a medical reason for not using their seat belt.
- Drivers and passengers of Class L (historical) motor vehicles and of vehicles not required by federal motor vehicle standards to be equipped with seat belts.

#### **MARYLAND CHILD PASSENGER SAFETY LAWS**

- The Child Passenger Safety law is primary enforcement in all seating positions and states:
  - A person transporting a child under the age of 8 years in a motor vehicle shall secure the child in a federally-approved child safety seat in accordance with the child safety seat and vehicle manufacturers' instructions unless the child: is 4 feet, 9 inches tall or taller. (TR§22.412.2)
  - A person may not transport a child under the age of 16 years unless the child is secured in: a child safety seat or a seat belt in all seating positions in all vehicles.
  - A child younger than 16 years may not ride in an unenclosed cargo bed of a pick-up truck. (TR§21.1121)

### **MARYLAND'S OCCUPANT PROTECTION PROGRAMS**

- ***Click It or Ticket*** ([zerodeathsmd.gov](http://zerodeathsmd.gov))

- A high-publicity law enforcement effort that gives people more of a reason to buckle up—the increased threat of a traffic ticket.
- For some people, it is the threat of the ticket that spurs them to put on a safety belt.
- Law enforcement agencies are being asked to mobilize to focus on safety belt violations and publicize the stepped-up effort through news media and advertising.
- Not only are tickets issued to unbelted motorists, but the surrounding publicity ensures that people know they are more likely to get a ticket.
- Maryland law enforcement is very active at both the state and local levels with the *Click It or Ticket* campaign.
- **SAFE KIDS** (<http://www.safekids.org/in-your-area/coalitions/maryland-state.html>)
  - The National *SAFE KIDS* campaign is the first and only national non-profit organization dedicated solely to the prevention of unintentional childhood injury—the number one killer of children ages 14 and under.
  - More than 500 state and local *SAFE KIDS* coalitions in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico comprise the campaign.
  - Maryland currently has ten individual state coalitions with the State *SAFE KIDS* Coordinator housed within the State Highway Administration.
  - Maryland’s *SAFE KIDS* units are continually active with respect to child safety by sponsoring child safety seat checks, coordinating press events, and generally maintaining information for use by parents and caregivers to keep children safe while traveling.
- **Kids in Safety Seats (KISS)** ([www.mdkiss.org](http://www.mdkiss.org))
  - *KISS* is a state-wide, non-profit program funded through federal and state grants.
  - The mission of *KISS* is to reduce injuries and death among Maryland’s children by helping people to obtain and use child restraints (car seats and booster seats) correctly each time a child rides in a motor vehicle.
  - *KISS* strives to:
    - Educate the public on all child passenger safety issues;
    - Promote the proper and consistent use of child restraints; and
    - Answer questions about Maryland’s child passenger safety laws and safe transportation recommendations.

## OCCUPANT PROTECTION TIPS

- **Adult Seat Belt Use**
  - The lap belt should be worn 2 to 4 inches below the waist, against the hips and upper thighs—never high over stomach or ribs.
  - The belt should be snug over the pelvis bone because this bone is strong enough to withstand the force of a crash.

- The shoulder belt should never be worn under the arm. It should be worn snugly across the chest with the belt lying against the collarbone.
  - Wearing the shoulder or lap belt incorrectly could cause broken ribs or serious internal injuries in a crash.
  - In a crash, the proper use of both the shoulder and lap belts will spread out the force of the impact across the strong pelvic bone and collarbone, increasing chances for survival.
  - **Think you are safer in a pickup?** You may think that since your truck is bigger, stronger and higher than most cars, you're safer. But the truth is most deaths in pickups occur in rollover crashes. Only a seat belt can prevent you from being ejected in a rollover crash.
- **Child Passenger Safety**
    - Car seats come in many sizes and designs. There is no "best" car seat. Instead, use a car seat that fits your vehicle, fits your child, and that you will use correctly every time.
    - Car seats are made to hold children in place and protect them in crashes. It is very important that a child sits in a car seat that is facing the right direction.
      - A child rides rear-facing until the maximum rear-facing weight limit of the convertible car seat.
      - After a child reaches the maximum rear-facing weight limit, turn the convertible car seat front-facing and use with the harness straps.
      - Or, use a combination car seat, which starts with harness straps and can then be used as a booster seat.
      - Use the harness straps in a front-facing car seat until the child gets too tall or too heavy for the straps. (Read manufacturer labels / instruction manual for this information or visit the manufacturer's website.)
    - No matter which direction a child faces or the type of car seat used, the back seat is the safest for all children!

## WHO TO CONTACT ABOUT OCCUPANT PROTECTION IN MARYLAND

### MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION MOTOR VEHICLE ADMINISTRATION

- Contact: MDOT MVA's Press Information at 410-762-5188

### MARYLAND SAFE KIDS

- Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems at 410-706-1758  
[www.miemss.org](http://www.miemss.org)

### MARYLAND KIDS IN SAFETY SEATS

- Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene at 410-767-1363  
[www.mdhhs.org](http://www.mdhhs.org)