

Contact: Anna Levendusky, Motor Vehicle Administration’s Highway Safety Office
alevendusky@mdot.maryland.gov

Motor Vehicle Administration’s Highway Safety Office Sees Slight Decrease in Seat Belt Usage in Maryland

Officials encourage Marylanders to buckle up as they travel for the holidays

GLEN BURNIE, MD (November 14, 2023) – The Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration’s Highway Safety Office said today that Maryland’s preliminary statewide seat belt usage, based on an annual survey, saw a rate of 92.1% – a slight decrease from 92.7% in 2022. The annual Roadside Observational Survey was completed in June 2023 and observed 33,882 drivers of passenger vehicles and trucks in 14 jurisdictions across the state on primary, secondary and local roads. The observations also included more than 6,531 passengers.

“Buckling up takes less than three seconds and is the single most effective way to prevent death and serious injury in a car crash,” said Maryland Motor Vehicle Administrator Chrissy Nizer, who also serves as Governor Wes Moore’s Highway Safety Representative. “We want everyone to make it to their Thanksgiving dinners and holiday gatherings, and buckling up is just one way to help make sure you make it.”

Each year, the seat belt survey reinforces how drivers set the safety standards for themselves and others in the vehicle. In vehicles where the driver was belted, 93% of passengers were belted too. Conversely, in vehicles with unbelted drivers, only 35% of passengers were buckled up. Unbuckled passengers can become projectiles in the event of a crash, causing injury or death to others in the vehicle, as well as partial or full ejection.

Buckle Up, Even for Short Trips on Local Roads

While overall seat belt rose, the percentage of drivers and passengers using seat belts as they traveled on local roads decreased by nearly four percentage points. The numbers indicate that while most people tend to wear seat belts when traveling on larger primary highways and secondary roads, some do not when driving on local roads. Drivers and passengers are urged to buckle up – every seat, every ride – as they travel, even if their destination is only a few miles from home.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 52% of collisions in the United States occur within a 5-mile radius of the home, and 69% of collisions occur within 10 miles. And even low speeds on local roads can lead to critical injuries; an unbelted occupant in a crash going 30 miles per hour hits a windshield or other surface with the same impact as falling from a three-story building.

Seat Belt Use in Trucks & SUVs

Another area of concern is low seat belt use for those in trucks and SUVs. The overall seat belt rate for trucks was 89%, with the rate dropping to 73.9% on local roads. Most truck and SUV drivers have the common misconception that because they are in a larger vehicle, they are safer from high impact crashes. Trucks and SUVs are much more prone to roll over in a crash while driving at high speeds. A seat belt can reduce the risk of fatal injury to the driver and front-seat passengers in SUVs, trucks and vans by 60%.

Click it or Ticket

In Maryland, the law requires every that every driver and passenger must wear a seat belt. If passengers older than 16 are not wearing a seat belt, the driver can receive an \$83 ticket for each offense. Children younger than eight must be in an appropriate booster or child safety seat unless they are 4 feet, 9 inches tall or taller.

So far in 2023, preliminary data shows that in Maryland, 108 people have been killed in car crashes while not wearing a seat belt. National data also shows that seat belt use tends to be lower among teen drivers and car crashes are one of the most common causes of death for people ages five through 24. Education is a key component for driver awareness, and the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration's Highway Safety Office is working to reinforce the importance of wearing seat belts through the "Be the BUCKLED UP Driver" campaign.

Learn more about the Motor Vehicle Administration's Highway Safety Office at ZeroDeathsMD.gov or on Facebook, X/Twitter, and Instagram at @ZeroDeathsMD.

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