

Motorcycle Helmet Safety In Nebraska

Nebraska is one of 19 states and the District of Columbia that have universal motorcycle helmet laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear a helmet. According to the 2016 Nebraska Helmet Use Observation Report, 99.7% of motorcyclist were observed using a helmet; 10.3% of those were illegal helmets.¹ Nebraska helmet use is higher than those states with no or partial helmet laws (partial or age-limited helmet laws require helmet use among a certain age group such as 21 years and under).

Motorcycle Statistics in Nebraska

- In 2016, 20 people died and 496 were injured in motorcycle crashes.¹
- Fifty-five percent of fatal motorcycle crashes involved alcohol in 2016.¹
- The average age of people killed in motorcycle crashes was 39.¹
- Only 1% percent of registered motorcyclists are under twenty years old.¹
- From 2008-2014, the total charges for all riders hospitalized as a result of a motorcycle crash was \$74 million, with \$6 million charged to Medicare and Medicaid.²
- Fatalities among those who wore a helmet was 3% while those who did not wear a helmet was twice as many at 6% in 2016.³

How Does Motorcycle Helmet Use Affect Nebraska?

When Nebraska reinstated its universal helmet use law in 1989, acute medical hospital charges for injured motorcyclists declined 38 percent.⁴ According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the overall economic cost savings in the United States due to helmet use was approximately \$3 billion, and an additional \$1.4 billion could have been saved if all motorcyclists had worn helmets.⁵

Overall, those injured who were unhelmeted had higher estimated costs than those who were helmeted, including both economic costs and comprehensive. The economic costs represent medical care, lost productivity, legal and court costs, insurance administrative costs, workplace costs, travel delay and property damage. Comprehensive costs are made up of economic costs plus the estimated costs associated with lost quality of life.⁵ The differences are greater at higher injury levels. For fatalities, however, the economic and comprehensive costs are the same regardless of helmet use.⁵

A study of Nebraska Trauma Data from 2008 - 2013 showed that unhelmeted motorcyclists were more likely to have a severe injury, to be diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury, and to die from their injury than those wearing a helmet. Unhelmeted riders were also more likely to be covered by a government insurance such as Medicaid or Medicare.

According to Nebraska Crash Outcome Data Evaluation System (CODES), from 2009-2013 Nebraska had the lowest age-adjusted death rate among surrounding states that have partial or no helmet laws; these states include South Dakota, Iowa, Colorado, Kansas and Wyoming.

Strategies to Prevent Motorcycle Crash Deaths

Motorcycle Helmet Laws

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has estimated that helmets prevent 37% of fatalities among motorcycle drivers and 41% of fatalities for passengers.⁵ The difference in effectiveness means that a rider can reduce the risk of fatal injury in a motorcycle crash by over one-third by simply wearing a proper helmet. NHTSA also estimates helmets are 8 percent effective in preventing minor injuries and 13 percent effective in preventing serious injuries.⁵ According to the Highway Loss Data Institute, when Michigan repealed its motorcycle helmet law in 2012, allowing motorcyclists 21 years and older to legally ride without a helmet, the overall medical payment costs were 50 percent higher than expected.⁶ Also, the medical payments claim severity is estimated to have increased 22 percent.⁶

According to the NHTSA, helmets are the most effective measure proven to save lives, and the universal helmet law (one that covers all motorcycle riders) is demonstrated to be the best way to ensure helmet use.⁷ When compared with states that had partial laws or no laws, states with universal helmet law had higher rates of helmet use and lower rates of motorcycle related deaths and injuries.⁸

Other countermeasures such as communications and outreach and/or helmet promotion programs show little or no evidence in reducing crashes or injuries.

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