

Motorcycle Helmet Safety in Nebraska

Nebraska is one of 18 states and the District of Columbia that have universal motorcycle helmet laws requiring all motorcyclists to wear a helmet. According to the 2018 Nebraska Helmet Use Observation Report, 99.8% of motorcyclist were observed using a helmet; 11.2% 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). In states with no universal helmet laws, usage rate was 71%.²

Motorcycle Statistics in Nebraska

- In 2019, 25 people died and 379 were injured in motorcycle crashes.¹
- The average age of people killed in motorcycle crashes was 39.¹
- Less than 1% percent of registered motorcyclists are under twenty years old.¹
- According to 2018 CODES data, unhelmeted riders (20%) were more likely to be covered by government insurance such as Medicaid or Medicare than helmeted riders (6.6%).

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.³ According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the overall economic cost savings in the United States due to helmet use was approximately \$3.5 billion, and an additional \$1.5 billion could have been saved if all motorcyclists had worn helmets.⁴ **In 2017, Nebraska's overall economic costs saved by helmet use was \$29,301,985 and \$180,397,120 in comprehensive costs.**⁴

Overall, those injured who were unhelmeted had higher estimated costs than those who were helmeted, including both economic costs and comprehensive costs. 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.⁴

According to 2018 Nebraska Crash Outcome Data Evaluation System (CODES), the mean (average) hospital charges for unhelmeted motorcycle drivers involved in crashes were \$17,628 more compared to helmeted motorcycle drivers. Among those wearing a helmet, the mean charges were \$41,736 and among those who were unhelmeted, the mean hospital charges were \$59,364. Unhelmeted riders are more likely to sustain a severe injury and also be diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury compared to helmeted riders (Trauma Registry, 2016-2019).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [WISQARS Injury Data](#), from 2014-2018 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 thirty-seven percent of fatalities among motorcycle operators and forty-one percent of fatalities for passengers. Minor injuries are reduced by eight percent and thirteen percent for serious injuries.⁴ The difference in effectiveness means that a rider can reduce the risk of fatal injury and injuries in a motorcycle crash by over one-third by simply wearing a proper helmet. 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.⁵ Also, the medical payments claim severity is estimated to have increased 22 percent.⁵

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.⁶ 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.⁷

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

Cited Resources

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- ⁶National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *Countermeasures That Work: A Highway Safety Countermeasure Guide for State Highway Safety Offices*. 9th Edition. Retrieved January 28, 2021.

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⁷The Guide to Community Preventive Services. *Use of Motorcycle Helmets: Universal Helmet Laws*. August 2013. Retrieved January 6, 2021.

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