

Seat Belt Use in Nebraska

Seat belt use is the single most effective means of reducing injuries and deaths related to motor vehicle crashes. In 2019, the observed seat belt use rate in Nebraska was 80%.¹ The national seat belt use rate was 90.7% in 2019 as measured by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) national seat belt use survey.² Seat belt use continues to be higher in the States in which vehicle occupants can be pulled over solely for not wearing a seat belt ("primary law States") as compared with the States with weaker enforcement laws ("secondary law States") or without seat belt laws.²

Seat Belt Use Statistics

In Nebraska in 2019, 248 people died and 17,198 were injured in traffic crashes.³

- Of the 248 Nebraskans who died as a result of traffic crashes, 197 were occupants of passenger vehicles. Of the 197 fatalities, 63% or 124 were not wearing a seat belt.³
- Of the 124 fatalities not wearing seat belts, 31 (25%) were thrown from the vehicle.³
- Unbelted vehicle occupant fatalities (77%) were more likely to occur in rural areas.⁴

How Does Non-Seat Belt Use Affect Nebraska?

Motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading causes of injury-related deaths in Nebraska. The 2019 observed statewide safety belt usage rate was 80%; however only 37% of vehicle occupants who died were belted.³ The average hospital charges for occupants restrained with a lap and shoulder belt during a motor vehicle crash in Nebraska in 2017 were \$7,747. The average hospital charges for unrestrained occupants during the same year were more than triple that amount: \$23,606.⁵ Overall, the projected economic costs of fatal motor vehicle crashes alone in Nebraska in 2019 were \$384,400,000.⁶

Strategies to Increase Seat Belt Use

Primary Enforcement of Seat Belt Laws

Studies show that seat belt use in states with primary laws is 9 percentage points higher compared to states with secondary laws.⁷ According to the Center for Disease Control's Motor Vehicle Prioritizing Interventions and Cost Calculator Tool, if Nebraska implemented a Primary Enforcement Seat Belt Law, the state is expected to save 11 lives and reduce injuries by 1,204 with a cost benefit per year of \$39,894,000.⁸

Nebraska's seat belt law states that the driver, each front-seat occupant in the vehicle and all children eight to eighteen years of age must wear a seat belt properly. All persons being transported by a motor vehicle operated by a holder of a provisional operator's permit or a school permit must use a seat belt and wear it properly. This is a secondary law, which means the driver is cited for this violation only if cited or charged with an additional violation or some other offense. A violation results in a \$25 fine. Nebraska is one of 15 states that have secondary laws enforcing front occupant seat belt use and one of 9 states that has no laws enforcing rear occupant seat belt use.⁹ According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, a driver of a motor vehicle is **two times more likely to be killed** when the passenger behind them is not wearing a seat belt.

Increased Fines

Increasing seat belt violation fines has been shown to increase seat belt use. Increasing a state's fine from \$25 to \$60 is associated with an increase up to four percent in observed seat belt use. Similarly, increasing the fine from \$25 to \$100 is associated with an increase in seat belt use up to seven percent.¹⁰

Short-term, High Visibility Enforcement

Law enforcement periodically practices enhanced enforcement. These are in addition to every day patrol practices and includes effective, high-visibility communications and outreach. One such program is *Click It or Ticket*. These programs increase the number of officers on patrol, which increases the number of citations. Observed safety belt use has a median increase of sixteen percentage points during enhanced enforcement programs. Fatal and nonfatal injuries combined see decreases of 7% and 15%.¹¹

Worksite Seat Belt Policies

Worksite seat belt policies decrease costs to employers by requiring employees to use their seat belt while on the job. According to the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), medical costs paid by employers per employee injured in a crash were nearly double in on-the-job crashes where the employee was not wearing a seat belt. Costs per employee injured in a crash on the job averaged \$48,000 unrestrained, far exceeding the \$25,000 cost if restrained. Employers bear the crash costs of their employees, not just their company drivers. More than 1.6 million work days were lost due to traffic crashes, with nearly 90 percent of those days attributed to crashes that occurred off the job, involving employees and/or their dependents.¹²

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Additional Resources

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