



Seat Belts: Safety by the Numbers

The good news: The vast majority of people wear seat belts. Nearly 90% of people riding in vehicles were wearing seat belts in 2018, according to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA). NHTSA data show that in 2017, seat belt use in passenger vehicles saved an estimated 14,955 lives.

The safety benefits of seat belts are clear. Wearing a seat belt is the single most effective way to prevent death and serious injury in a car crash. Drivers and passengers who buckle up are 45% less likely to die and 50% less likely to be moderately injured in a crash (NHTSA).

Who Is Not Wearing Seat Belts?

The one in ten people who are still not buckling up are vulnerable to injuries and death in car crashes. Odds are that some of your employees are among them. The people who are less likely to wear seat belts need particular attention to help them see the benefits and overcome the barriers to buckling up:


- **Younger males**
- **Commercial truck drivers**
- **Pickup truck drivers and passengers**
- **Passengers in the rear seat**
- **Teens**

Younger males - Men age 18 to 34 are less likely to buckle up. They may believe that they are less at risk. For this population, prevention campaigns have focused on stronger enforcement of seat belt laws. Employers could follow a similar strategy by passing policies that require seat belt use during work-related driving, and enforce compliance with the policies.

Commercial truck drivers - By law, commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers must use safety belts, according to Section 392.16 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. Passengers in large commercial trucks must now also wear safety belts, as of 2016, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA).

According to a 2013 FMCSA observational study of CMV drivers and occupants, 84% of medium and heavy duty truck and bus drivers were wearing seat belts. Among passengers of these commercial vehicles, 73% were buckled up. Seat belt usage among drivers and occupants in vehicles identified as part of a fleet were higher than for independent owner-operators (86% vs 75%).

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Pickup truck drivers and passengers - The lower seat belt use rate in pickup trucks – 83% in 2016 – is especially worrisome (NHTSA). In fatal crashes, pickups roll over twice as often as passenger cars. If a pickup truck rolls over during a crash, seat belts increase the odds of survival by 80%. Pickup truck occupants are at risk of getting ejected, and most vehicle occupants who are ejected do not survive. According to NHTSA, people not wearing a seat belt are 30 times more likely to be ejected from a vehicle during a crash. More than 3 out of 4 people who are ejected during a fatal crash die from their injuries.

Employers with pickup trucks in their fleets should emphasize the need for wearing safety belts. Pickup truck drivers who are making many stops may be less likely to wear seat belts due to wanting ease of getting in and out of the pickup truck. But they expose themselves to greater risk of injury or death if a crash occurs.

Passengers in the rear seat - Adult passengers in the rear seat are less likely to buckle up. Rear seat passengers may be less likely to buckle up in taxis and ride-sharing vehicles. This is dangerous even for short trips. Fatality rates are higher in the back seat than the front, because front seat passengers are protected by airbags and other safety engineering improvements that are less available in the rear seat. In addition, unbelted rear seat passengers essentially become missiles in the vehicle during a crash. Even one unbelted passenger is a danger to everyone in the vehicle during a crash. All passengers should buckle up in every seating position during every ride.

Teens - If you employ teens who drive as part of their work, it's important to influence them to buckle up on the job. Teens are less likely to wear seat belts than adults. In 2013, over half of teens killed in crashes were not wearing a seat belt (U.S. DOT).

