

Motorcycles

Motorcycles, which are less stable and less visible than other vehicles, are more likely than cars to be in crashes. Motorcycle riders lack the protection of an enclosed vehicle, so are more likely to be injured or killed.

Per mile traveled, the number of deaths on motorcycles is about 27 times the number in cars; 3,590 motorcyclists died in crashes in 2003 nationwide. Motorcycle deaths had been declining since the early 1980s but began to increase in 1998 and have continued to increase. Since 1997, motorcycle deaths are up 75 percent. The increase is due in part to a dramatic jump in the number of deaths among motorcycle riders 40 and older, accounting for 45 percent of fatally injured motorcyclists in 2003.

Death rates from head injuries have been shown to be twice as high among motorcyclists in states with no helmet laws or laws that apply only to young riders, compared with states where laws apply to all riders. Helmets are about 37 percent effective in preventing motorcycle deaths and about 67 percent effective in preventing brain injuries. An unhelmeted rider is 40 percent more likely to suffer a fatal head injury, compared with a helmeted rider.

Some facts about motorcycle accidents:

- Forty-three percent of motorcycle deaths in 2003 occurred in single-vehicle crashes, and 57 percent occurred in multiple-vehicle crashes.
- Seventy-two percent of 2003 motorcycle deaths occurred during April-September. They peaked in August and were lowest in January.
- Sixty percent of 2003 motorcycle deaths occurred on Friday-Sunday.
- Among motorcycle drivers killed at night in 2003, 56 percent had BACs at or above 0.08 percent.
- Ninety percent of motorcyclists killed in 2003 were males.