

02-01

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Universal Motorcycle Helmet Laws

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports the enactment of universal helmet laws, which require all motorcycle and moped drivers and passengers to wear helmets that meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 218¹.

In addition, NACCHO encourages the Department of Transportation (DOT) to reinstate incentives for states to enact universal motorcycle helmet laws in order to qualify for certain federal safety programs and highway construction funds.

NACCHO urges local health departments to work collaboratively with local and state partners to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to reduce motorcycle crash-related injury and death. Also, public health education should be directed toward increasing awareness about the risks of head injury and death from riding without an approved helmet.

Justification

Strategies to reduce motorcycle crash-related injury and death include traffic laws and appropriate enforcement mechanisms, motorcycle operating licensing and training, road conditions improvements, mechanical improvements to vehicles, clothing and motorcycle visibility improvements, efforts to reduce impaired driving, and educational programs and campaigns.^{2,3} Helmet use, however, is the only scientifically proven strategy to reduce motorcycle crash-related injury and death. The most effective strategy to increase motorcycle and moped helmet use is the universal helmet law.

In 2014, 4,586 people were killed in motorcycle crashes, accounting for 14 percent of all road traffic deaths.⁴ Per vehicle mile traveled in 2014, motorcyclists were about 27 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in a motor vehicle traffic crash and five times more likely to be injured.⁴ Since 2005, motorcycle-related deaths peaked in 2007 and 2008 and declined slightly in recent years.⁴ Between 2004 and 2008, for every person that died in a motor vehicle crash, there were about 20 helmeted motorcyclists injured.⁵ For motorcyclists without helmets during the same period, there were about 14 injured per fatality.⁵

Helmets are estimated to be 37 percent effective in preventing fatal injuries to motorcycle riders and 41 percent effective for motorcycle passengers.⁶ In 2013, helmets saved the lives of 1,630 motorcyclists; an additional 715 lives could have been saved had all motorcyclists worn helmets.⁷ A University of Southern California study, that analyzed 3,600 traffic crash reports covering motorcycle crashes, concluded that helmet use was the single most important factor in surviving motorcycle crashes.⁸



Analysis by the National Highway Safety Administration of data in 2014 examined state helmet laws and helmet use in fatal motorcycle crashes. Eight percent of fatally injured motorcyclists in states with universal helmet laws were not wearing helmets compared to 58 percent in states with partial or no helmet laws.¹⁰ In 2013, the states with universal helmet laws saved an average of 48 lives because more motorcyclists wore helmets; states without universal helmet laws saved an average of 21 lives per state and with universal helmet use could have saved an additional 21 lives per state.¹¹ The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that in 2013, motorcycle helmet use saved \$2.8 billion; had motorcycle helmets been worn in all motorcycle crashes, an additional \$1.1 billion would have been saved.¹¹

In 1967, the federal government required states to enact helmet use laws in order to qualify for certain federal safety programs and highway construction funds. The law resulted in nearly all states enforcing universal motorcycle helmet laws. However, in 1976, states successfully lobbied Congress to change the law and discontinue financial penalties for states without helmet laws.¹² At the time of publication, 19 states and the District of Columbia have universal helmet laws, 28 states have partial helmet laws that require specific groups to wear helmets, and three states (Illinois, Iowa, and New Hampshire) have no helmet laws.¹²

The DOT requires that all helmets sold in the United States meet Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 218, which defines minimum levels of performance that helmets must meet to protect the head and brain in the event of a collision. DOT-approved helmets should weigh about three pounds, include a thick inner liner, sturdy chin strap and rivets, and must not allow anything to extend further than two-tenths of an inch from the surface of the helmet.⁹

References

1. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *Motorcycle Helmets (FMVSS 218), 49CFR Section 571.218*. Retrieved on January 9, 2017 from <https://one.nhtsa.gov/cars/rules/import/FMVSS/index.html>
2. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2011). *Countermeasures that work: A highway safety countermeasure guide for state highway safety offices* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation.
3. Teoh, E.R. (2011). Effectiveness of antilock braking systems in reducing motorcycle fatal crash rates. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 12(2):169–173.
4. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (June 2016). *Traffic Safety Facts: Motorcycles*. Retrieved on November 2, 2016, from <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812292>.
5. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (March 2011). *Traffic Safety Facts: Determining Estimates of Lives and Costs Saved by Motorcycle Helmets*. Retrieved on March 28, 2013 from <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.gov/pubs/811433.pdf>.
6. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2008). *Traffic Safety Facts, Motorcycles, 2008 Data*.
7. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (October 2015). *Traffic Safety Facts: Estimating Lives and Costs Saved By Motorcycle Helmets with Updated Economic Cost Information*. Retrieved on November 2, 2016 from <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812206>.
8. Hurt, H.H., Jr., Ouellet, J.V., Thom, D.R. (1981). *Motorcycle Accident Cause Factors and Identification of Countermeasures Volume I: Technical Report*. University of Southern California, Traffic Safety Center, Motorcycle Accident Research. University Park, Los Angeles, CA.
9. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (2004). *How to Identify Unsafe Motorcycle Helmets*. Retrieved on May 20, 2013, from <http://www.nhtsa.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/motorcycle/unsafehelmetid/pages/page2.htm>.

10. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (June 2016). *Traffic Safety Facts: Motorcycles*. Retrieved on November 2, 2016, from <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812292>. .
11. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. (October 2015). *Traffic Safety Facts: Estimating Lives and Costs Saved By Motorcycle Helmets with Updated Economic Cost Information*. Retrieved on November 2, 2016 from <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812206>.
12. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. (November 2016). *Motorcycle Helmet Use*. Retrieved on November 2, 2016 from <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/laws/helmetuse>.

Record of Action

Proposed by NACCHO Injury and Violence Prevention Workgroup

Adopted by NACCHO Board of Directors February 28, 2002

Updated July 2007

Updated July 2013

Updated January 2017