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Behind the Wheel at Work

NIOSH CENTER FOR MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY

Behind the Wheel at Work is a quarterly eNewsletter bringing you the latest news from the NIOSH Center for Motor Vehicle Safety.
Volume 5 Number 3 September 2020

Adapting Motor Vehicle Safety Practices During Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

What have we learned about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on crashes? What do we not yet know? How can employers reduce the risk of exposure for workers who drive as part of their job? Let's explore this topic as it relates to motor vehicle safety.

Update on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Response

While the NIOSH Center for Motor Vehicle Safety will continue to share valuable safety information in our quarterly Behind the Wheel at Work eNewsletter, you can stay up to date on the COVID-19 response in real time on CDC's COVID-19 webpage or sign up for CDC's COVID-19 newsletter.

Sign Up: Behind the Wheel at Work

To receive the email newsletter, enter your email address:

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In This Issue

Effects of COVID-19 on Crashes

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of public health measures to slow disease spread have been implemented throughout the U.S. These measures have impacted many aspects of our lives, including road travel and safety. In our last issue, we mentioned that adopting journey management principles can protect the health of your workforce and reduce the risk of crashes and injuries as businesses reopen. This month, we're looking at what we do and don't know about the effects of COVID-19 on crashes in the general public as well as the impact on workers.

Timeline of Events

- **January 31:** The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency for the United States to aid the nation's healthcare community in responding to COVID-19.
- **March 11:** The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic.
- **March 13:** The President of the United States declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency.
- **March 13:** The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) issued a nationwide emergency (Emergency Declaration No. 2020-002)
  - In doing so, FMCSA addressed the need for immediate transportation of essential supplies, equipment and persons, and provided necessary relief from the FMCSA regulations for motor carriers and drivers engaged in the transport of essential supplies, equipment, and persons.
    - FMCSA granted emergency relief from Parts 390 through 399 of the FMCSA regulations for the fifty States and the District of Columbia.
  - Because public health conditions continued, emergency declarations were extended by FMCSA and expanded on: March 18, April 8, May 13, July 13, August 11, and September 11. They are currently set to expire on December 31, 2020.
- **March 19:** The first statewide stay-at-home order went into effect, and 40 states followed. The number of motor vehicles on U.S. roads and number of miles driven were reduced, with more people staying at home.
- **April 24:** States began reopening (ongoing).

Miles Driven and Crashes in the General Public

There have been several national and state reports highlighting reductions in miles driven and varying changes in the number and rate of crashes in the general public during the pandemic. Some findings include:

- Even though miles driven by Americans from January-July 2020 decreased, estimates from the National Safety Council (NSC) show that driving became more dangerous. The NSC reports that during July 2020, the number of roadway deaths increased by 11% and the fatality rate per miles driven increased by 26% compared to July 2019. This means that those who were on the road had a higher risk of dying in a crash.
- The NSC also reports that the estimated cost of these motor vehicle deaths, injuries, and property damage through May 2020 was $249.4 billion.
- States have conducted preliminary motor vehicle data analyses and have reported varying changes in motor vehicle travel patterns, crashes, and associated injuries.
  - In Virginia , fewer vehicles on the road during the COVID-19 crisis (mid-March to mid-May) led to a 45% decrease in all crashes compared to 2019, but the number of crash-related fatalities involving both speed and unrestrained travelers increased by 78%.
  - In California , during a period of time under the shelter-in-place order (March 21 to April 11), the number of overall crashes and fatal crashes were half those in the period prior to the order and half those during a similar period in 2019. However, there was a slight increase in average speeds (between 1 to 4 mph), primarily on urban highways.

Contributing Factors

Reports indicate that less-congested roads led to increases in risky driving behaviors.

- Emptier streets may have encouraged some drivers to ignore traffic safety laws, including speed limits. The Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) reported that the COVID-19

pandemic led to a spike in speeding and reckless driving behaviors. Four states reported a surge in drivers with highway speeds over 100 miles per hour.

- Increases in crash severity were observed compared to the same time period in 2019, such as in Massachusetts .
- Law enforcement and state reports from several states highlight the importance of addressing speeding and seat belt use.

What We Don't Know

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic downturn on work-related motor vehicle safety remain to be seen. It is likely that some worker groups, such as essential workers, have been affected. Undoubtedly, we will find that there are impacts on driving behaviors and crashes at work. A few of the complex factors that may affect work-related road safety include:

- Personal and work-related stress, anxiety, alcohol and substance use, and other mental health issues arising during the pandemic.
- Work-related driving speeds, as compared to the general public. It is unknown if increases in speeding were primarily recreational, or if workers felt additional pressures at work that facilitated the need to speed.
- The impacts of workers opting out of local public transit, crew transport, and carpools to limit COVID-19 exposures and using personal vehicles for commutes.
- The impacts of delayed or suspended personal and commercial license renewals on work-related crashes.
- The impacts on essential workers who continued to commute to and from work throughout the pandemic despite personal stressors, long work hours, and fatigue.
- The impacts on essential workers who drive for a living (e.g., long-haul truck drivers) and faced closed facilities while on the road or encountered limited supplies at open facilities.

The Bottom Line: Road travel has been greatly impacted as a result of COVID-19. Instances of increased speeding and seat belt non-use are occurring in the general public, and the rate of fatal crashes in the U.S. has increased. Employers can:

- Reinforce motor vehicle safety messages and the importance of complying with traffic safety laws;
- Educate drivers on the risks associated with speeding and the critical importance of seat belt use;
- Ensure drivers have access to information on dealing with stress and anxiety; and
- Stay up to date on reopening of commercial license facilities and when the waivers for renewals expire.

Safety Tip

While driving the posted speed limit on a dry road may be safe, the same speed on a wet or icy road or at night may be unsafe and too fast for the conditions.

How to Prevent the Spread

CDC has issued guidance related to transportation and COVID-19. Below is a summary of some of the key reminders for employers to reduce the risk of exposure for workers who drive as part of their job.

Carpooling

- Encourage workers to avoid carpooling to and from work, if possible.
- If carpooling using crew vans, company shuttles, or other shared vehicle spaces is a necessity for workers, use the following practices:
  - Limit the number of people per vehicle as much as possible. This may mean using more vehicles.
  - Encourage employees to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
  - Before you leave and upon arrival at your destination, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
  - If sharing a van or car space, wear a mask.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces after each trip (e.g., door handles, handrails, seat belt buckles).
- If a third party must have access to the interior of a vehicle (e.g., mechanics, inspectors), request that the third party clean and disinfect the truck before turning it back over to you.
- Provide alcohol-based hand sanitizers containing at least 60% alcohol, alcohol wipes for disinfecting surfaces, tissues, and small trash cans for vehicles.
- When using fuel pumps, parking meters, and pay stations, consider using alcohol wipes to disinfect surfaces or use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol after use. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds as soon as it is possible.

Prevention

- Encourage employees to cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue, throw the tissue away in a small trash bag in the vehicle, and use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Understand that the current environment could elevate stress levels among drivers. Provide resources to help manage stress.

Ventilation

- Avoid using the recirculated air option for the car's ventilation during passenger transport; use the car's vents to bring in fresh outside air and/or lower the vehicle windows.

Visit these CDC COVID-19 resources for more information:

- Carpooling and Preventing the Spread of COVID-19
- Protect Yourself When Using Transportation
- What Long-Haul Truck Drivers Need to Know about COVID-19
- What Rideshare, Taxi, Limo, and other Passenger Drivers-for-Hire Need to Know about COVID-19
- What Mail and Parcel Delivery Drivers Need to Know about COVID-19
- Resources on Stress and Coping

The Bottom Line: You can take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during vehicle transport.

New NSC Resource

As part of its *SAFER: Safe Actions for Employee Returns* initiative, the National Safety Council has a new resource to guide employers through the process of safely resuming traditional work and operations.

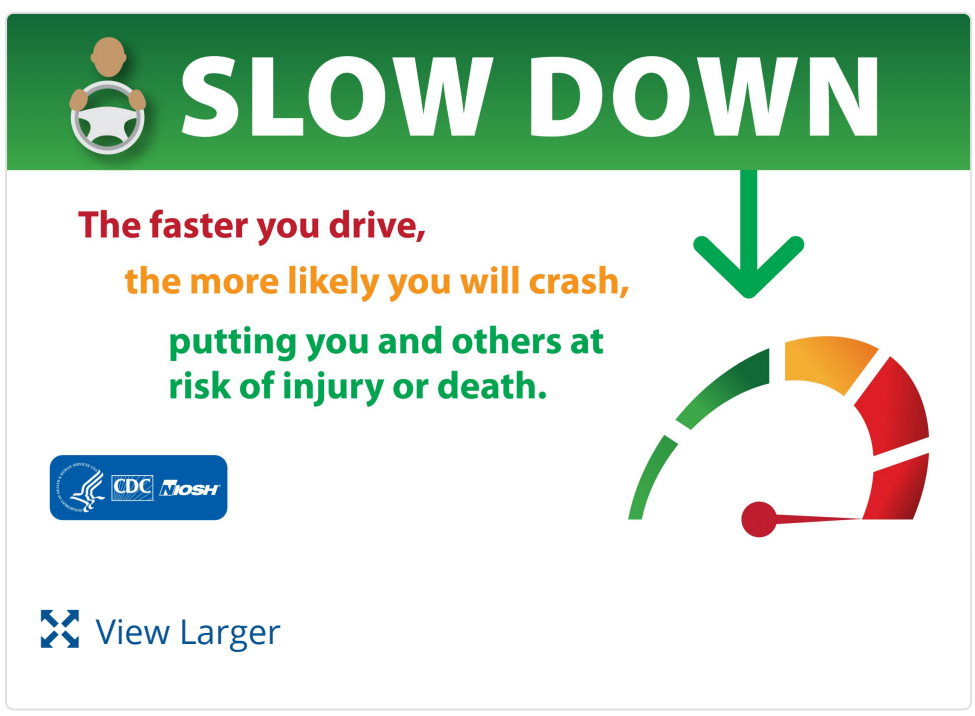
Learn more about transportation considerations .

New CMVS Strategic Plan, 2020-2029

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Center for Motor Vehicle Safety's (CMVS) strategic plan for 2020-2029 is now available. The plan identifies research needs for four priority industry sectors and describes how we envision those stakeholders will put research results into practice. Its purpose is to guide NIOSH-funded research to prevent work-related motor vehicle crashes – the leading cause of workplace deaths in the U.S. – and encourage collaboration between the CMVS and external partners.

Image to Promote Speed Safety

You can download and share these images within your organization to promote safe speeds.



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More Information

- Please send your comments and suggestions to us: kur4@cdc.gov
- Follow us on Twitter: @NIOSH_MVSafety
- Visit our webpage: Motor Vehicle Safety at Work

Page last reviewed: September 29, 2020