

Fatal car crashes less likely in major cities, CDC study finds

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Urban sprawl may be a factor in higher crash death rates in metro areas in the South, researchers say.

(HealthDay) -- The death rate from motor vehicle crashes in America's 50 largest cities is lower than the overall rate for the nation -- 8.2 deaths versus 11.1 deaths per 100,000 people, respectively, a new study finds.

Looking at 2009 data, the researchers from the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) found that people in these 50 largest metropolitan areas represented 54 percent of the U.S. population but accounted for only 40 percent of that year's crash deaths.

Crash death rates in the metro areas ranged from 4.4 to 17.8 per 100,000, and 37 (74 percent) of the metro areas had rates lower than the overall national rate. Among metro areas, crash death rates were generally higher in southern states, with the highest rates in the

southeastern United States.

In the [metro areas](#), the crash death rate for people aged 15 to 24 was 13 per 100,000, which is higher than the overall rate for people of all ages. The overall national rate of crash deaths for people in this age group was 17.3 per 100,000, the study found.

The variations in crash death rates highlight the need to learn more about the factors that affect the risk of dying in a crash, the CDC researchers pointed out. They suggested that [urban sprawl](#) may be partly responsible for the differences in metropolitan crash death rates.

"Previous research has shown that sprawl is more common in the southern United States, and that motor vehicle crash [death rates](#) are higher in sprawling metropolitan areas than in compact metropolitan areas," Scott Kegler, of the CDC's Office of Statistics and Programming, and colleagues wrote in the July 20 issue of the [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#).

Motor vehicle crashes among teens and [young adults](#) are of particular concern because they are the leading cause of death in the 15-to-24 age group, the researchers noted. The investigators recommended prevention efforts such as: use of strong graduated-driver licensing policies, including nighttime driving limits and passenger restrictions; and enforcement of minimum legal drinking age and zero-tolerance laws for drivers younger than age 21.

Although [motor vehicle crash](#) rates in the United States have declined in recent years, crashes remain a leading cause of injury and death. In 2009, there were 34,485 crash deaths and 22 percent of those who died were aged 15 to 24, Kegler's team noted.

More information: The U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration offers a wide range of information on [driving safety](#).

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