

More Americans buckling up than ever before, report says

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Overall seat belt use hits 86 percent nationwide, most dramatic increases seen in southern states.

(HealthDay)—Seat belt use by American drivers and passengers reached an all-time high of 86 percent in 2012, a new federal government study finds.

Seat belt use has steadily increased since 1994, and this year's figure is 2 percent higher than last year, according to the U.S. [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#)'s annual National Occupant Protection Use Survey.

The most dramatic increases in seat belt use were seen in southern states, rising from 80 percent in 2011 to 85 percent this year.

Seat belt use continues to be highest in states with primary seat belt laws, which allow police to give people tickets solely for not wearing a seat belt. In states with secondary seat belt laws, police can issue tickets for not wearing a seat belt only when another traffic violation occurs.

Nationwide, 32 states and the District of Columbia have primary seat belt laws, while another 17 states have secondary seat belt laws. New Hampshire is the only state that does not have a primary or secondary seat belt law. The state does have a primary child passenger safety law that applies to all drivers and passengers younger than 18.

"Thanks to the ongoing work of our state and local partners and national efforts such as 'Click it or Ticket,' we've made steady gains in belt use in recent years," NHTSA administrator David Strickland said in an agency news release. "Moving forward, it will be critical to build on this success using a multi-faceted approach that combines good laws, effective enforcement, and public education and awareness."

According to U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, "When it comes to driving safely, one of the most effective ways to protect yourself and your family is to use a seat belt. This Thanksgiving holiday, we're urging everyone on our roadways to buckle up—every trip, every time," he said in the NHTSA news release.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [seat belts](#).

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