

Stress and weight-related conditions prevalent among rookie bus drivers

February 27 2018



A program studying heart disease and obesity in truck drivers has been expanded to review the occupational impact on bus drivers. Credit: TriMet

Though buses are constantly on the move, the drivers who operate them spend most of their work hours seated.

While helping people get around town can be rewarding, the sedentary nature and challenging schedules involved in driving a bus can also put workers at risk for stress and [weight gain](#). Some industry estimates indicate a new bus operator may gain between 7 and 20 pounds in their first year if employers and workers do not take preventive actions.

Now, a five-year, \$3.5-million research project aims to help new bus operators succeed early in their driving careers and avoid health pitfalls. The project's focus on new employees may provide long-term prevention of weight-related health conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure, as well as foster well-being, job satisfaction and overall work performance.

"Public transportation is an important community service and something that anyone who rides the bus can appreciate," said the project's lead investigator, Ryan Olson, Ph.D., an associate professor in OHSU's Oregon Institute of Occupational Health Sciences and the OHSU-PSU School of Public Health. The project's research team members hail from both OHSU and Portland State University.

"However, being a new bus driver – or a newcomer in any industry – can be stressful, and long hours spent sitting and other factors can elevate risks for [chronic health conditions](#) in professional drivers," Olson added. "This project will enable us to study working conditions for new drivers and work with employers and union partners to help them succeed."

Researchers will enroll about 300 new bus operators from multiple Western U.S. cities to help them be healthy, happy and safe during their first years on the job. An occupational health program previously created by the research team for truck drivers will be tailored for bus operators and integrated with existing new employee training activities.

Operators will participate in a group competition to help them set and

achieve safety, health, and well-being goals. They also will track goals and complete training online, as well as receive in-person support through discussion with health coaches and fellow drivers.

Such early intervention may help drivers establish long-lasting work habits that benefit them, their passengers and transit authorities. In addition to protecting operators against weight gain and supporting job success, the study will assess new drivers' working conditions and measure how driving might disrupt eating, exercise, sleep and weight.

Olson and colleagues are partnering with more than six regional transit authorities, including TriMet, in the Portland metropolitan area, and the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, whose members include TriMet operators.

"We value our bus operators as their hard work and dedication is vital to TriMet and our riders," said TriMet executive director of Safety & Security Harry Saporta. "We have exercise facilities at all three of our bus garages, provide a wellness program and conduct annual health fairs for our employees. This study will help further our efforts to give new operators additional tools to stay healthy."

"Operating a bus is hard on your body," said ATU 757 President Shirley Block. "You're sitting in one position for hours at a time, you have to navigate any number of traffic hazards, and you have to do it all while safely getting your riders where they need to go. It's no surprise that operators can experience high rates of chronic illness and stress-related conditions. This project is an exciting new opportunity to address some of those issues head-on. I'm looking forward to partnering with OHSU, PSU and TriMet to promote on-the-job health for our operators."

This is a follow-up project to an [earlier study](#) Olson led that helped participating commercial truck drivers lose an average of nearly 8

pounds over six months.

Provided by Portland State University

Citation: Stress and weight-related conditions prevalent among rookie bus drivers (2018, February 27) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-02-stress-weight-related-conditions-prevalent-rookie.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.