

Nearly 1 in 3 patients involved in a car crash during their lifetime admit distracted driving

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About 18% of patients with injuries sustained in motor vehicle crashes (MVCs) acknowledge that distracted driving contributed to the crash—although the true rate is likely even higher, according to a report

in *The Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery*. The journal is published in the Lippincott portfolio in partnership with Wolters Kluwer.

Meanwhile, nearly every patient in the survey study acknowledged distracted driving at least sometimes, according to the new research, led by Bill Ristevski, MD, of McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont., Canada. "Essentially, despite the apparent dangers, all drivers engage in distracting behavior," the researchers write.

Higher risk of crash for 'distraction-prone' drivers

In a nationwide study, 1,378 patients being treated at four Canadian fracture clinics completed an anonymous survey. About 12% of the patients had been injured in MVCs. Patients were asked about their habits in regard to distracted driving and whether distractions contributed to their current injury or to previous crashes.

Nearly all respondents—99.7% – acknowledged distracted driving in the last 12 months. The most frequent types of distractions were talking with a passenger and listening to or adjusting the radio. Other common distractions included out-of-vehicle distractions, eating/drinking, adjusting the radio, and daydreaming. Surprisingly, the pervasiveness of distracted driving held true even when the researchers analyzed only the more dangerous distractions associated with a high risk of crashing—such as texting, programing/adjusting a navigation system, daydreaming, and making [phone calls](#) while holding the phone.

About two-thirds of respondents reported using [mobile devices](#), while nearly 40% said they used a handheld device to make calls. Although 60% of patients said they pulled over to a secure location before using electronic messages, 35% still reported sending messages while driving, at least on rare occasions.

"Among the 113 drivers injured in an MVC, 20 (17.7%) acknowledged being distracted at the time of the [crash](#)," the researchers write. About 31% of patients admitted to being distracted at the time of a previous crash; 48% said that distractions contributed to previous "close call" incidents.

Patients with higher survey scores for distracted driving were classified as "[distraction](#)-prone." Patients in this group were twice as likely to be involved in a distracted driving MVC. Other [risk factors](#) for distraction-related collisions included male sex, older age, and higher income levels.

Distracted driving is a major contributor to the rising rates of deaths and injuries due to MVCs. The National Safety Council estimates that 1 out of every 4 crashes is due to [mobile phone use](#) while driving. However, there is still a lack of data on traumatic injuries due to distracted driving.

The new survey of patients attending fracture clinics finds that distracted driving is "near universally acknowledged." About 1 in 6 patients with MVC-related injuries admit that distractions contributed to their most recent crash, while 1 in 3 reported being distracted in a MVC during their lifetime. The true rate of distracted driving in MVCs is likely even higher: some patients may have been unwilling to admit to distracted driving, even in an anonymous survey.

The researchers add that many patients who were more severely injured or who died due to distracted driving were not included in the study.

"When factoring all this in, it would be reasonable to believe that our data are a conservative representation of the proportion and severity of distracted driving occurring on the roads," Dr. Ristevski and colleagues write.

The authors believe their study is an important first step toward understanding the impact of distracted driving on the healthcare system.

They conclude, "These data are crucial for informing the public and the government and for educating drivers, and could help to evoke positive change."

More information: The DRIVSAFE Team, Distracted Driving Among Patients with Trauma Attending Fracture Clinics in Canada, *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* (2022). [DOI: 10.2106/JBJS.21.01184](https://doi.org/10.2106/JBJS.21.01184)

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