

US traffic deaths rise to highest level since 2007

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Even though Americans drove less in the early days of the COVID-19

pandemic, close to 39,000 lives were lost on U.S. roadways in 2020—the highest death toll since 2007, the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports.

Fatal collisions spiked almost 7% between 2019 and 2020, the safety administration revealed in its annual crash report.

"The tragic loss of life of people represented by these numbers confirms that we have a deadly crisis on our nation's roads," said Steven Cliff, NHTSA's deputy administrator.

"While overall traffic crashes and people injured were down in 2020, fatal crashes and fatalities increased," Cliff said in an agency news release. "We cannot allow this to become the status quo."

In 2020, the fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled rose to 1.34, a 21% increase from 2019.

When many Americans were in lockdown, road deaths increased even though total vehicle miles traveled fell by 11% from 2019 to 2020, the data showed.

Risky behaviors contributed to many of these tragedies: In 45% of [fatal crashes](#), drivers of passenger vehicles were either speeding, impaired by alcohol, or not wearing a seat belt.

Other major findings from the 2019-2020 data:

- Deaths involving [drunk driving](#) jumped 14%.
- Deaths of people in [passenger cars](#) increased 9%, and deaths of unrestrained people in passenger vehicles rose 14%.
- Motorcyclist deaths rose 11%, reaching the highest number since data was first collected in 1975.

- Bicyclist deaths increased more than 9%, hitting the highest number since 1987.
- Fatalities in cities rose almost 9%, and pedestrian deaths approached 4%, the highest number since 1989.
- Deaths in hit-and-run crashes jumped 26%
- Deaths in large-truck crashes declined 1.3%.
- Police-reported crashes declined 22%.
- Number of people injured fell 17%.

"This sudden uptick of lives lost in preventable crashes is caused by a combination of factors," said Pam Shadel Fischer, senior director of external engagement with the Governors Highway Safety Association.

"The safety of all road users must be the top priority when it comes to roadway design. We continue to face an ongoing safety crisis threatening people walking, biking, scooting and rolling. Drivers are still engaging in [risky behaviors](#) that put all road users at risk," Shadel Fischer said in an association statement.

"The U.S. Department of Transportation has established a national framework for action in its new [National Roadway Safety Strategy](#) based on the Safe System approach. However, more action is clearly needed on the federal, state and local levels," Shadel Fischer said.

The DOT strategy calls for safer roads, safer people, safer vehicles, safer speeds and better post-crash care.

"The rising fatalities on our roadways are a national crisis; we cannot and must not accept these deaths as inevitable," U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said.

"People should leave the house and know they're going to get to their destination safely," Buttigieg added in the NHTSA news release.

More information: The NHTSA has [safe driving tips](#).

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