

Vanderbilt doctors say repeal of Tennessee's motorcycle helmet law is a bad idea

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Vanderbilt physicians strongly oppose a repeal of Tennessee's mandatory motorcycle helmet law.

Tennessee's Legislature is again considering a repeal of the state's mandatory motorcycle helmet law. The bill, which is scheduled to be heard by the House Transportation General Subcommittee early next week, would allow individuals over 21 to ride motorcycles without a helmet.

Physicians and staff of Vanderbilt University Medical Center strongly oppose a repeal of the law, claiming [motorcycle](#) helmets save lives and reduce health care costs.

Already, convincing accident and injury data exists from states that repealed longstanding motorcycle helmet laws, proving serious injuries

increase while costs for treating accident victims—both in the acute health care setting and long-term through rehabilitation and permanent disability –will also rise.

Since other states began repealing helmet laws in 1997, motorcycle-related deaths have steadily increased each year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 5,290 motorcycle-related deaths in 2008, and estimates that motorcycle injuries and deaths average nearly \$12 billion a year in medical care costs and productivity losses.

Richard Miller, M.D., chief of the Division of Trauma and Critical Care, says he treats serious motorcycle injuries each week in VUMC’s Trauma Unit. The Trauma Service admits more than 100 cases a year.

“Similar to seatbelts, [helmets](#) reduce the chances of serious head injuries,” Miller said. “Deep brain injuries from motorcycle accidents often result in long-term disabilities for these patients, and their ability to return to a productive lifestyle goes down significantly.”

Miller said motorcycle helmet safety has become a societal issue, since medical institutions and taxpayers are often charged with the residual expenses. It’s estimated that Tennessee’s Level 1 trauma centers provide about \$5 million of health care each year to brain-injured motorcyclists.

VUMC researchers estimate a repeal of this law will result in a minimum 30 percent increase in health care costs, or another \$1.3 million per year for these patients to be treated by the state’s Level 1 trauma centers. This figure does not include other substantial costs for this patient population, such as associated hospital charges from community hospitals, rehabilitation care, in some instances long-term (nursing home) care, and loss of income to the patient and family during recovery.

Since 1997, many of the states that once repealed their motorcycle

helmet laws have reinstated the requirement.

Provided by Vanderbilt Medical Center

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