

Universal helmet laws may help save young motorcyclists

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Study finds more serious head injuries in states with age restrictions only or none at all.

(HealthDay)—A new study suggests that state laws requiring "universal" motorcycle helmet use—instead of helmet laws just for certain ages—may lower the rates of traumatic brain injuries in young riders.

Traumatic brain injuries are "the biggest burden in trauma care, so we wanted to see whether having universal [helmet laws](#) versus age-specific helmet laws really made a difference in the younger population," study co-author Dr. Bellal Joseph, a trauma surgeon and associate professor of surgery at the University of Arizona, Tucson, said in a news release from the American College of Surgeons.

States with universal helmet rules require all [motorcycle](#) drivers and passengers to wear a helmet. The new research doesn't confirm a link

between the universal motorcycle helmet laws and lower rates of serious head injuries among youths. Still, researchers said that laws requiring helmets do reduce deaths and traumatic head injuries in adults.

Nineteen [states](#) and the District of Columbia require all motorcycle riders to wear helmets. Some states require them only for those under 18 or 21, even though research shows that the highest rates of death and injury are among riders aged 20 to 24.

"We know from research that helmet use is significantly greater in states with universal laws compared to those with age-limited laws or no laws at all," lead study author Dr. K. Tinsley Anderson, a general surgery resident at the University of Arizona, said in the news release.

"What we also find is that having an age-limited law is the same as having no law at all," Anderson added. "The rates of helmet usage in those states are the same as not having a law at all."

The researchers examined a database of hospital admissions with a focus on patients who suffered traumatic brain injuries due to motorcycle accidents in 2011. They found 598 cases in 39 states.

The rate of traumatic brain injuries per motorcycle accident was lower in the states with universal helmet laws compared to those that require helmets for riders of certain ages: 307 per 1,000 in states with laws requiring helmets for those under 18 years; 366 per 1,000 in states requiring helmets for those under 21; and 282 per 1,000 in states requiring universal helmet use.

Death rates from traumatic brain injuries were also lower in states with universal helmet laws, the investigators found.

After accounting for all injuries together, the researchers said that young

riders in states with universal helmet laws were 2.5 times less likely to suffer a traumatic head injury than those in states with age restrictions.

The study was released Tuesday at the annual meeting of the American College of Surgeons in San Francisco. The data and conclusions of research presented at meetings are usually considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

More information: For more about motorcycle safety, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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