



Seatbelt Use in Montana, 2023

EMS & Trauma Systems Section

SEATBELT USE IN MONTANA

Medical cost* savings associated with increased seatbelt usage

- Montana has had a secondary seatbelt law since 1987 and is currently one of 15 states without a primary law
- Primary enforcement seatbelt laws permit law enforcement officers to stop and cite a violator independent of any other traffic violation
- Upgrading to a primary law is expected to increase seatbelt use by about 10 percentage point^{8,9}
- In Montana, a 10-percentage point increase in seatbelt use could save over \$4.2 million in lifetime medical costs* annually by preventing deaths, hospitalizations, and ED visits over one year. State government insurance payers (Medicaid, Worker Compensation) could save over \$1.1 million annually

*Lifetime medical cost estimates the cost of medical treatment rendered over initial and follow-up healthcare visits. It does NOT include additional economic costs such as lost productivity, workplace losses, court and legal costs, insurance administration costs, emergency services, property damage, and lost quality of life valuations

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Motor vehicle crashes (MVCs) kill nearly 200 Montanans every year and send thousands to the hospital with injuries.¹ Of the 2,015 Montanans killed in MVCs from 2011-2020 50% were not wearing seatbelts.² According to the National Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA):

“Buckling up helps keep you safe and secure inside your vehicle, whereas not buckling up can result in being totally ejected from the vehicle in a crash, which is almost always deadly.”

Montana Department of Transportation reports that out of 73 fatalities due to ejection in 2020, 67 were unrestrained (92%).²

75.2% of Montana adults self-reported that they always wear a seatbelt in the 2020 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey⁴ and the 2022 Billings Area Indian Health Service observational seatbelt survey reported that 60.2% of drivers and 50.3% of passengers buckled up.⁵ For comparison, NHTSA reported that the national seat belt use rate in 2020 was 90.3%.³

Adopting a primary seatbelt law will reduce motor vehicle deaths and injuries by 7-8%⁶ and help Montana to reach its goal of 12 deaths per 100,000 people as compared to 17 per 100,000 now.⁷ For comparison, the national MVC mortality rate is currently 12 per 100,000 people.¹⁰

RESOURCES

1. Injury Deaths by County Surveillance Report – Montana DPHHS, 2019 <https://dphhs.mt.gov/assets/publichealth/EMSTS/prevention/InjurySurveillance.pdf>
2. Montana Department of Transportation 2011-2020 Crash Data
3. Seat Belts, NHTSA, <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/seat-belts>
4. Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. 2020.
5. Billings Area Indian Health Service Seatbelt Survey 2022
6. <https://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/calculator/factsheet/seatbelt.html>
7. 2019-2023 Montana State Health Improvement Plan: <https://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/ahealthiermontana/2019SHIPFinal.pdf>
8. Richard, CM, et al. (2018, April). Countermeasures that work: A highway safety countermeasure guide for State Highway Safety Offices, 9th edition (Report No. DOT HS 812 478). Washington, DC: NHTSA. https://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/publications/files/countermeasures_9.pdf
9. Nichols, Tippetts, Fell, Eichelberger, and Haseltine (2014) The effects of primary enforcement laws and fine levels on seat belt usage in the United States. Traffic Injury Prevention, 15(6), 640-644.
10. CDC WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports, 2020 <https://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>