

Georgia Traffic Safety Facts

2021 Preliminary Data

January 2023

Other upcoming topics for the 2021 *Georgia Traffic Safety Facts* publication series are:

- Non-Motorists
- Distracted Driving
- Occupant Protection
- Risky Driving
- Motorcycles
- Large Trucks
- Rural Roads
- Young Adult Drivers
- Older Drivers

This fact sheet contains information from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS), Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) crash data modified by Crash Outcomes Data Evaluation System (CODES) at the Department of Public Health (DPH), and Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group (TSREG) at the University of Georgia (UGA).

PRELIMINARY MOTOR VEHICLE TRAFFIC FATALITIES IN 2021

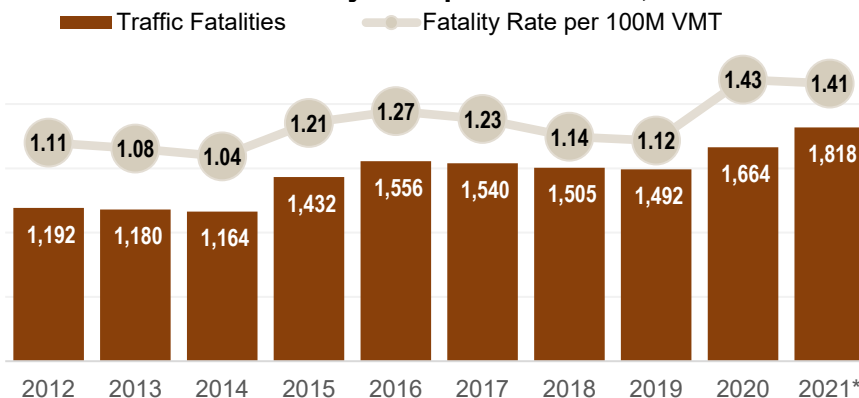
This fact sheet provides a preliminary overview of traffic fatalities, serious injuries, and crashes on Georgia roadways. The 2021 preliminary data were obtained from the 2021 Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group (TSREG) Preliminary Fatality Data and the 2021 Crash Outcomes Data Evaluation System (CODES) Preliminary datasets. The preliminary 2021 data may differ from the final counts published in the 2021 FARS final and 2021 CODES. Readers are encouraged to exercise caution when interpreting the information that uses 2021 preliminary crash data due to the potential incompleteness and the quality of the preliminary dataset. Refer to the 'Data Considerations' section at the end of this publication for more information.

Traffic Fatalities and Serious Injuries

Fatalities and Injury Rates

Preliminary crash data in Georgia shows that there were 1,818 motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2021—a 9 percent increase from the 1,664 roadway fatalities in 2020. Despite the increase in the number of fatalities, the estimated rate of traffic fatalities for every 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) decreased from 1.43 in 2020 to 1.41 in 2021. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Highway Policy Information Traffic Volume Trends, vehicle miles traveled in Georgia increased by 11 percent between 2020 and 2021—exceeding the pre-pandemic norms (see *Traffic Safety During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency*, 2020 Georgia Traffic Safety Facts Issue Brief [\[1\]](#)).

Figure 1: **Fatalities and Fatality Rate per 100M VMT, 2011-2021***



Source: FARS 2011–2020, *2021 Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group (TSREG) Preliminary Fatality Data, and 2021 FHWA Office of Highway Policy Information Traffic Volume Trends.



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Suspected Serious Crash Injuries

Between 2017 and 2021, the number of suspected serious crash¹ injuries have steadily increased from year to year. Table 1 shows the number and rate of suspected serious injuries in Georgia between 2017 and 2021.

According to preliminary crash data, the number of suspected serious injuries increased by nearly 1,330 injuries (46 percent)—from 7,606 in 2020 to 8,937 in 2021 (Table 3). In 2021, there were 6.93 serious traffic injuries per 100M VMT (a 63 percent increase from 2017) and 2,306.7 serious traffic injuries per 100,000 traffic crashes (a 74 percent increase from 2017).

Other injury surveillance sources also showed increased motor vehicle traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries in 2021: police-crash reports, emergency medical services, emergency room only (emergency department), and hospital inpatient discharge (hospital). These surveillance systems are independent so the number of traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries may not be the same for each data source.

- According to Emergency Medical Services (EMS), there was a 41 percent *increase* in motor vehicle traffic-related fatalities where EMS reported to a motor vehicle crash incident (from 913 to 1,285).
- According to emergency department data, there was a 40 percent *decrease* in motor vehicle traffic-related fatalities among patients receiving care in a Georgia emergency room only (from 195 to 116).
- According to hospital data, there was a 2 percent *increase* in motor vehicle traffic-related fatalities among patients admitted into a Georgia hospital (244 to 248).

Table 2: **Serious and Fatal Motor Vehicle Traffic-Related Injuries by Injury Surveillance Source** (2020 and 2021)

| Data Source | 2020 | | 2021* | | 2020-2021 Percent Change | |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------|------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| | Serious Injuries | Fatalities | Serious Injuries | Fatalities | Serious Injuries | Fatalities |
| Crash Reports | 7,620 | 1,664 | 8,937 | 1,818 | ▲ 17.3% | ▲ 9.3% |
| Emergency Medical Services | 1,074 | 913 | 1,334 | 1,285 | ▲ 24.2% | ▲ 40.7% |
| Emergency Department | 5,125 | 195 | 5,382 | 116 | ▲ 5.0% | ▼ -40.5% |
| Hospital | 2,641 | 244 | 3,221 | 248 | ▲ 22.0% | ▲ 1.6% |

Source: OHIP Hospital Inpatient Discharge and Emergency Room Visit Data 2020-2021, CODES 2020, *2021 CODES Preliminary data, *2021 TSREG Preliminary Fatality Data. Note: All persons involved in a Georgia crash receiving care in Georgia ED or Hospital regardless of their state residency. EMS arrivals to motor vehicle traffic crashes with reported serious injuries and fatalities may or may not have resulted in transport to a medical facility.

¹ Suspected Serious Injuries are reported by law enforcement responding to a motor vehicle crash scene. Suspected serious injury is used when any injury, other than fatal injury, prevents the injured person from walking, driving, or normally continuing the activities the person was capable of before the injury occurred. See Data Considerations for more information on serious injuries.

Table 1: **Suspected Serious Injuries and Rates, 2017-2021***

| Year | Suspected Serious Injuries | Suspected Serious Injury Rate | |
|-------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| | | Per 100M VMT | Per 100,000 Crashes |
| 2017 | 5,370 | 4.25 | 1,327.5 |
| 2018 | 6,401 | 4.79 | 1,590.8 |
| 2019 | 7,308 | 5.53 | 1,808.9 |
| 2020 | 7,606 | 6.58 | 2,293.0 |
| 2021* | 8,937 | 6.93 | 2,306.7 |

Source: FFY2022 GOHS Core Performance Measures, *2021 CODES Preliminary data, *2021 Numetric Preliminary data (extracted December 2022) for total crashes, 2021 FHWA.

Person Types

The number of fatally injured persons (occupants and non-occupants) involved in motor vehicle traffic crashes on public roads increased between 2020 and 2021. The comparison of these injuries by person type is shown in Table 3.

- Passenger vehicle occupant fatalities increased by 13 percent—from 1,072 in 2020 to 1,212 in 2021.
- Motorcyclist fatalities decreased by 5 percent. Despite these decreases, the number of un-helmeted motorcyclist fatalities increased by two—from 18 in 2020 to 20 in 2021.
- Pedestrian fatalities increased by 14 percent—from 279 in 2020 to 318 in 2021.
- Bicyclist fatalities decreased by half—from 32 in 2020 to 16 in 2021.

Seat Belt Use & Distraction

Passenger Vehicle Restraint Use and Fatalities

According to the 2022 Georgia Seat Belt Observational Survey², the rate of seat belt use for drivers and front right-seat passenger vehicles³ decreased by nearly 6 percent from 94.4% in 2021 to 89.3% in 2022. The seat belt usage rate for drivers and front seat passengers (right side) was nearly the same—89.2% among drivers and 90.4% among front seat passengers.

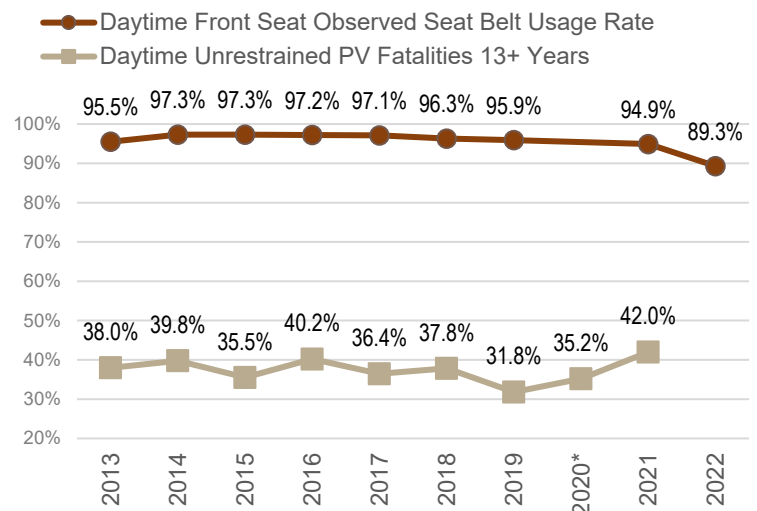
Unrestrained passenger vehicle occupant fatalities increased by 18 percent from 465 in 2020 to 549 in 2021. In 2021, 45 percent of PV occupants involved in a crash and fatally injured were unrestrained (a net 2-point change increase from 2020).

Table 3. **Traffic Fatalities by Person Type (2020-2021*)**

| Person Type | 2020 | 2021* | Change | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| | | | Number | Percent |
| Traffic Fatalities | 1,664 | 1,818 | 154 | ▲ 9.3% |
| Passenger Vehicle Occupant Fatalities | 1,072 | 1,212 | 140 | ▲ 13.1% |
| Motorcyclist Fatalities | 192 | 182 | -10 | ▼ -5.2% |
| Pedestrian Fatalities | 279 | 318 | 39 | ▲ 14.0% |
| Bicyclist Fatalities | 32 | 16 | -16 | ▼ -50.0% |
| Other Fatalities | 89 | 90 | 1 | ▲ 1.1% |

Source: 2020 FARS and *2021 TSREG Preliminary Fatality Data

Figure 2. **Georgia Seat Belt Usage Rate and Daytime Front Seat Passenger Vehicle (PV) Occupant Fatalities Ages 13+ Years by Restraint Use, 2013-2022**



Source: 2022 Seat Belt Observational Survey and *2021 TSREG Preliminary Fatality Data
 * Note, Georgia opted not to conduct the Seat Belt Observational Survey in 2020 under the NHTSA waiver through the CARES Act. Therefore, Georgia safety belt usage data is not available for 2020.

² Rupp, Jonathan. 2022. "Statewide Use of Seat Belt Restraints: An Observational Survey of Seat Belt Use in Georgia." The Injury Prevention Research Center at Emory (IPRCE), Emory University: Atlanta, Georgia

³ Passenger vehicles are defined as passenger cars, light trucks (including vans, sport utility vehicles (SUV), and pickup trucks).

Figure 3 shows the ten-year period of seat belt use compared to the percent of front-seat passenger vehicle occupant fatalities (aged 13 years or older) during the daytime by restraint use. In 2021, 42 percent of fatally injured front-seat, daytime passenger vehicle occupants aged 13+ years were unrestrained—seven times more than what was observed during the seat belt survey.

*Georgia has maintained a high **child safety seat usage rate** over the past decade for children 8 years of age or younger. In 2022, Georgia estimated the child safety usage rate to be 88.8 percent.*

Distracted Driving

According to the observational study “2022 Estimates of Driver Distraction in the State of Georgia,”⁴ 17 percent of Georgia drivers were observed to be distracted while operating a motor vehicle (see data considerations for categories of distraction used in the study). The rate of driver distraction was higher among those who were unbelted (23 percent) than those who were belted (16 percent). Distracted driving also decreased with increasing age and was higher among women than among men.

17 percent of Georgia drivers were observed to be distracted while operating a motor vehicle. This includes using a hand-held device (talking or texting/dialing), talking hands-free, or other distractions such as eating.

Police Reported Crashes

Compared to pre-pandemic years (2017-2018), the number of police-reported motor vehicle crashes on public roads, injury crashes, and Property-Damage-Only (PDO) crashes changed between 2019 and 2021, as shown in Table 6. As noted in the other publications⁵, the decrease in crashes and PDO crashes between 2019 and 2020 can be attributed to several factors, including the reduction in the number of drivers on Georgia roadways and fewer police officers reporting to crashes with no injuries. Between 2020 and 2021, there was a 17 percent increase in total police-reported crashes, an 11 percent increase in fatal traffic crashes, an 18 percent increase in serious injury crashes, and a 19 percent increase in PDO crashes.

Table 4: **Police-Reported Crashes by Crash Severity, 2017-2021**

| Crash Severity | Year | | | | | 2020-2021 Change | |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------------|---------|
| | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | Number | Percent |
| Total Crashes | 404,076 | 402,227 | 403,897 | 331,710 | 387,444 | 55,734 | ▲ 17% |
| Fatal Crashes | 1,440 | 1,408 | 1,378 | 1,522 | 1,684* | 162 | ▲ 11% |
| Non-Fatal Crashes | 402,636 | 400,819 | 402,519 | 330,188 | 385,760 | 55,572 | ▲ 17% |
| Serious Injury Crashes | 4,468 | 5,252 | 6,069 | 6,370 | 7,531 | 1,161 | ▲ 18% |
| Property-Damage-Only Crashes** | 297,142 | 295,190 | 289,184 | 234,142 | 278,916 | 44,774 | ▲ 19% |

⁴ Rupp, Jonathan. 2022. “2022 Estimates of Driver Distraction in the State of Georgia: Results from the 2022 Roadside Observational Seatbelt Survey”. The Injury Prevention Research Center at Emory (IPRCE), Emory University: Atlanta, Georgia

⁵ Georgia Crash Outcomes Data Evaluation System. (2022, February). Traffic Safety During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency: 2020 preliminary data. (Georgia Traffic Safety Facts). Atlanta, GA: Governor’s Office of Highway Safety.

Data Definitions and Considerations:

A traffic crash is defined as an incident that involves one or more motor vehicles where at least one vehicle was in transport, and the crash originated on a public traffic way, such as a road or highway. Crashes that occurred on private property, including parking lots and driveways, are excluded.

Fatal crashes are defined as crashes that involve a motor vehicle traveling on a traffic way customarily open to the public and that result in the death of a motorist or a non-motorist within 30 days of the crash.

Serious injuries are those suspected serious injuries reported by law enforcement and used when any injury, other than fatal injury, prevents the injured person from walking, driving, or normally continuing the activities the person was capable of before the injury occurred.

The 2021 Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group (TSREG) Preliminary Fatality Data includes all Georgia roadway fatalities for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other road users. Data is derived from the Georgia Department of Transportation's (GDOT) daily fatality reports, cross-referenced with the Georgia Electronic Accident Reporting System's (GEARS) online database, and validated with GDOT's Fatal Crash Recording System (FCRS) database. Delays in data availability at the time of analysis are possible due to the inherent nature of reporting roadway fatalities.

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), the Federal agency responsible for the use of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10th revision (ICD-10) in the United States, has developed a clinical modification (CM) of the classification for morbidity (EMS, trauma, hospital, and ER data) purposes. ICD-10 Codes used were: V30-V39 (.4-.9), V40-V49 (.4-.9), V50-V59 (.4-.9), V60-V69 (.4-.9), V70-V79 (.4-.9), V81.1 V82.1, V83-V86 (.0-.3), V20-V28 (.3-.9), V29 (.4-.9), V12-V14 (.3-.9), V19 (.4-.6), V02-V04 (.1-.9), V09.2, V80 (.3-.5), V87(.0-.8), V89.2

In the observational study for distracted driving, driver distraction was divided into 5 categories: (1) Hand-held device (talking): The driver is observed holding a hand-held device to their ear; (2) Hand-held device (texting/dialing): driver is visibly manipulating a hand-held device; (3) Talking (hands-free): driver is talking or speaking while wearing a visible earpiece or headset, mounted device, or talking to another vehicle occupant (4) Other distraction: driver is otherwise distracted (includes activities such as eating, drinking, or smoking); or (5) No visible distraction.

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Preliminary Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities in 2021: 2021 Preliminary Data. (Georgia Traffic Safety Facts). Atlanta, GA: Governor's Office of Highway Safety.