

Sobering study on motorcycle crashes could influence US helmet laws

After a brutal winter, many motorcycle enthusiasts will soon be dusting off their rides to take advantage of balmy weather, but they don't have to brush off their helmets because Connecticut does not have a mandatory helmet law.



According to a new study by researchers at Yale School of Medicine, University of Connecticut and the Connecticut Department of Health, this has led to high fatalities and injuries from motorcycle crashes that likely cost billions of dollars in hospital and rehabilitation bills.

Published in the May issue of the journal *Connecticut Medicine*, the study was presented at the first ever Southern Connecticut Community Traffic Safety Conference sponsored by Yale on 10 March. The conference brought together academics, government officials, and law enforcement to improve Connecticut traffic safety.

The authors analysed motorcycle crash data from the Connecticut Department of Transportation between 2001 and 2007. Study author Michael Phipps, M.D., of the Yale Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars Program, and his colleagues assessed multiple factors including age, gender, seating position, road type, season, time of day and recklessness. The goal was to assess the association of helmet use with motorcycle crash mortality and to identify characteristics of riders who do not wear helmets and have been involved in Connecticut crashes.

The study found that those less likely to use helmets included male riders, passengers, those riding the summer or in the evening/overnight, and those younger than age 18 or between ages 30 and 59.

Wearing a helmet makes sense

"We found that helmet use is associated with a lower risk of fatal crashes in Connecticut, which was a predictable finding supported by previous data," said Phipps. "But we have also found a set of factors that can help predict non-helmeted riders, and we can now target safety training to this group."

Twenty states and the District of Columbia have mandatory helmet laws for all riders and passengers. Connecticut and 26 other states have partial helmet laws. Connecticut lawmakers are considering policy and legislative changes to reduce the injury and economic burden of motorcycle crashes.

Connecticut instituted a universal helmet law in 1967 in response to the 1966 Highway Safety Act that threatened withholding federal highway funds from states without universal helmet laws. Congress amended this act in 1976, and Connecticut subsequently repealed its universal helmet law the same year. In 1989, Connecticut instituted a partial helmet law mandating helmet use by motorcycle riders and passengers less than 18-years-old.

Over the last 20 years, Connecticut state legislation has been introduced five times to mandate helmet use by all riders, but it has been defeated each time. "As the state considers these policy changes, we would like the debate to be informed by accurate, complete and up-to-date data," said Phipps.

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Other authors included Adam Landman, M.D., Kimberly Jawin, Lauri Bolton, M.D., Carin M. Van Gelder, M.D., Richard Kamin, M.D., Bill Teel and Federico E. Vaca, M.D.

Source: Yale University

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