

Motor vehicle accidents

The motor vehicle accident is the greatest single cause of accidental death in Australia, with about one-third of all accidental deaths occurring on the roads. Conservative estimates suggest that the annual cost of motor vehicle accidents in Australia (including costs such as medical treatment, workplace absence and vehicle replacement or repair) is about \$17 billion.

Every year, about 400 Victorians die on our roads and a further 6,000 need hospital treatment for injuries.

Types of transport accident

Studies show that seven main types of transport accident cause over half of all road trauma. These include:

- A car colliding with another vehicle such as a car, truck or van
- A car colliding with a stationary object such as a tree
- A motorcycle crash that does not involve a collision, such as a fall
- A bicycle crash that does not involve a collision, such as a fall
- A car involved in a non-collision accident such as a rollover
- A rider of an animal (for example, a person on horseback) involved in a non-collision accident such as getting bucked off
- A pedestrian hit by a car, truck or van.

Selected statistics on injuries

Selected statistics include:

- Young people (aged less than 30 years) account for over half (52%) of road trauma victims.
- Males are more than twice as likely as females to be injured in a motor vehicle accident, mainly because most motorcyclists and bicyclists are male.
- Compared to car drivers, motorcyclists are 38 times more likely to incur a serious injury on the road.
- In most cases, a person involved in a motor vehicle accident has more than one injury.
- About one-third of serious injuries are life threatening.
- Motor vehicle accidents cause about half of all spinal injury cases.
- The most common injuries for car occupants, including drivers and passengers, involve the head and chest.
- The most common injuries for motorcyclists involve the shoulders, legs and arms.
- The most common injuries for bicyclists involve the shoulders, arms and head.
- The most common injuries for pedestrians involve the head and legs.

What to expect from emergency care

At the site, ambulance officers treat the person who is injured in a motor vehicle accident. The officers then transport the injured person to hospital. A hospital emergency room does not operate on a 'first come, first served' basis. Instead, a nurse conducts 'triage', which is a system that decides how urgently a person needs medical attention.

The Australasian Triage Scale includes:

- **Category 1** – a life-threatening situation; the person must be treated immediately

- **Category 2** – the person must be treated within 10 minutes
- **Category 3** – the person must be treated within 30 minutes
- **Category 4** – the person must be treated within an hour
- **Category 5** – the person must be treated within two hours.

Emotional trauma

Even after the physical injuries have healed, a survivor of a serious motor vehicle accident may find their life is forever changed. Perhaps their physical injuries prevent them from working or fully participating in life as they did before. Maybe someone died in the accident.

A survivor can experience ongoing and sometimes severe emotional and mental anguish, for example:

- Flashbacks
- Sleeping problems
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Grief
- Depression.

It may help the person to talk about their feelings with someone they trust, such as a family member or friend. They could consult with a doctor for further information on counselling and support.

Factors that have reduced the Victorian road toll

Over recent years in Victoria, the rates of road-related fatalities and serious injuries have steadily fallen. Studies show that various measures are responsible for the reduced road toll, including:

- Reduction in drinking and driving due to public awareness of random breath-testing
- Increased presence of 'booze buses' on the roads
- Reduction of freeway speed limits from 110kph to 100kph
- Upgrades to road systems, including improvements to accident 'black spot' areas
- Introduction of speed cameras and red light cameras
- Advertising campaigns about road safety
- Introduction of road safety laws, such as the bicycle helmet law
- Improved safety features in cars, including seatbelts and airbags
- Upgrading of compulsory seatbelt legislation coupled with education and enforcement.

Reduce your risk of accidents and injuries

Many road accidents can be avoided. Suggestions include:

- Obey road rules.
- Don't drive after drinking alcohol, taking drugs or some prescription medications, or when you're tired.
- Always wear a seatbelt.
- Maintain your vehicle in good condition.
- Always wear protective gear including a helmet, a long-sleeved jacket, long trousers and sturdy shoes if you ride a motorbike or push bike.
- Cross the road carefully when you're on foot. Use traffic lights or a pedestrian crossing whenever possible.
- Teach your children about road safety.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Always call an ambulance in a medical emergency Tel. 000
- Road Trauma Support Services Victoria Tel. 1300 367 797

- Transport Accident Commission Tel. 1300 654 329

Things to remember

- About one-third of all accidental deaths occur on the roads, making motor vehicle accidents the greatest single cause of accidental death in Australia.
- Every year, about 400 Victorians die on our roads and a further 6,000 need hospital treatment for road trauma injuries.
- About one-third of serious injuries caused by motor vehicle accidents are life threatening.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Department of Health - Victorian State Trauma System

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