

Motorcycle-related head injury death rates in states with partial or no helmet-use laws are twice those in states with comprehensive helmet use laws.

*Many injuries happen in **predictable, preventable** ways.*

Helmets that meet the DOT standard do not reduce visibility or impair hearing. Helmets only make riding safer.

Motorcycle Helmet Q&A

Q. Is it true that “no law” states have lower death rates than states with helmet laws?

A. This is *not true* for motorcyclists dying with head injuries, and no one claims that helmets protect against other life-threatening injuries. **Head injury death rates per vehicle registration are lowest in states with full helmet use laws.** Enactment of comprehensive motorcycle helmet laws have consistently shown substantial decreases in motorcycle-related head injury death rates, and motorcycle fatalities increase 28-45% after repeal of mandatory helmet laws. Oklahoma has a partial helmet law; in 2010, the state was 41st in the rate of lives saved by helmet use.

Q. Do helmets obstruct peripheral vision?

A. Helmets do not obstruct your critical vision. Normal peripheral vision ranges between 200–220° in width. The DOT standard requires helmets provide a visual field range of 210° in width. A University of Southern California (USC) study showed 90% of all motorcycles in crashes happen within a range of 160°, and the majority of the remainder are rear-end collisions.

Q. Do helmets interfere with critical hearing?

A. No, any sound loud enough to be heard over the noise of a motorcycle and the wind will be loud enough to be heard inside a helmet. Helmets reduce the loudness of both the sound of interest (e.g., a car's horn) and the motorcycle noise by an equal amount, but do not alter the ability to hear one over the other. No case of 900 on-scene, in-depth investigations in a USC study revealed a failure to detect critical traffic sounds, for helmeted or non-helmeted riders.

Q. If motorcyclists are just hurting themselves, why not leave them alone?

A. They are not just hurting themselves, they are hurting taxpayers as well. Each year in the U.S., the economic burden from crash-related injuries and deaths totals \$12 billion. Typical hospital charges in Oklahoma are over \$13,000 higher for unhelmeted motorcyclists than those wearing a helmet. Even if the motorcyclist has insurance, the substantial healthcare costs are passed on to others in the form of higher insurance premiums. In 2010, Oklahoma was 41st in economic costs saved by helmet use.

The constitutionality of a motorcycle helmet use law was challenged in a Massachusetts court and upheld in the U.S. Supreme Court in 1972. The opinion reads in part: *“From the moment of the injury, society picks the person up off the highway; delivers him to a municipal hospital and municipal doctors; provides him with unemployment compensation if, after recovery, he cannot replace his lost job and, if the injury causes permanent disability, may assume the responsibility for his and his family's subsistence. We do not understand a state of mind that permits the plaintiff to think that only he himself is concerned.”* Simon v. Sargent, 396 F. Supp. 277, 279 (D. Mass. 1972), Affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court, 1972

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