

Motorcycle Fatality Rates Due to Head Injuries are Lower in States with Helmet Laws

Mary E. Helander

There are over 4,500 motorcycle crash fatalities per year in the U.S., on average. Roughly 37% of those deaths involve head injuries. Since the 1976 removal of the mandatory helmet requirement from the [1966 National Highway Safety Act](#), 31 states have repealed or significantly downsized their requirement for motorcyclists and passengers to wear helmets while riding. Three states - New Hampshire, Iowa, and Illinois - have no helmet laws, and 29 states require helmets only for young (e.g., below 18 or 21 years of age) or for newly licensed riders (see Figure 1). Motorcycle helmet laws reduce fatalities, serious cognitive disabilities, and social costs. Notably, states with helmet laws had a 33% lower head-related fatality rate (0.4 deaths per 100,000 population) compared to states without helmet laws (0.6 deaths per 100,000 population) for the 1999-2019 period (see Figure 2). From 1999-2019, there were approximately 7,000 excess deaths in states without helmet laws compared to what they may have experienced with helmet laws in effect. Motorcycle helmet laws clearly save lives.

About the Author

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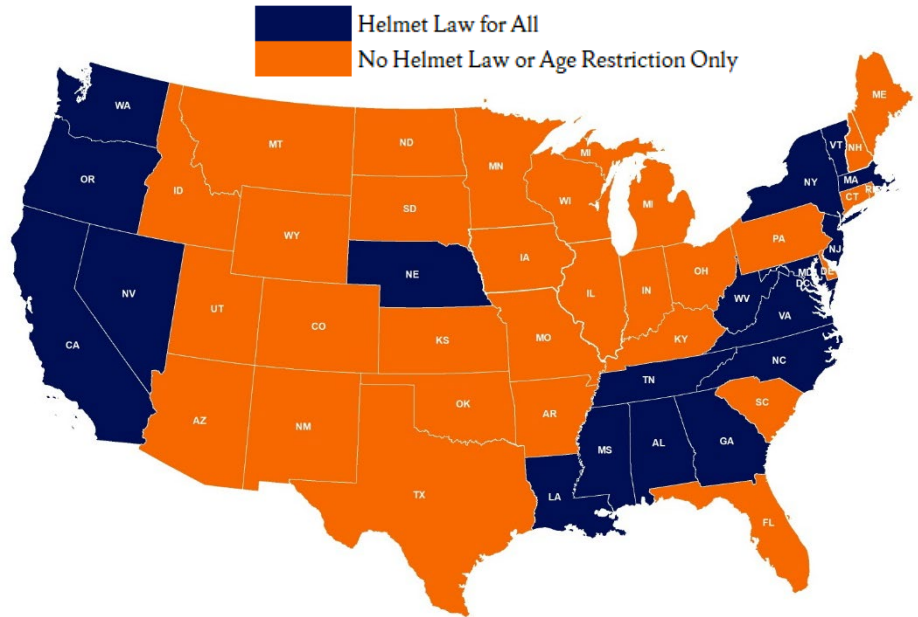


Figure 1: Helmet Laws by State as of 2021

Data Source: [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

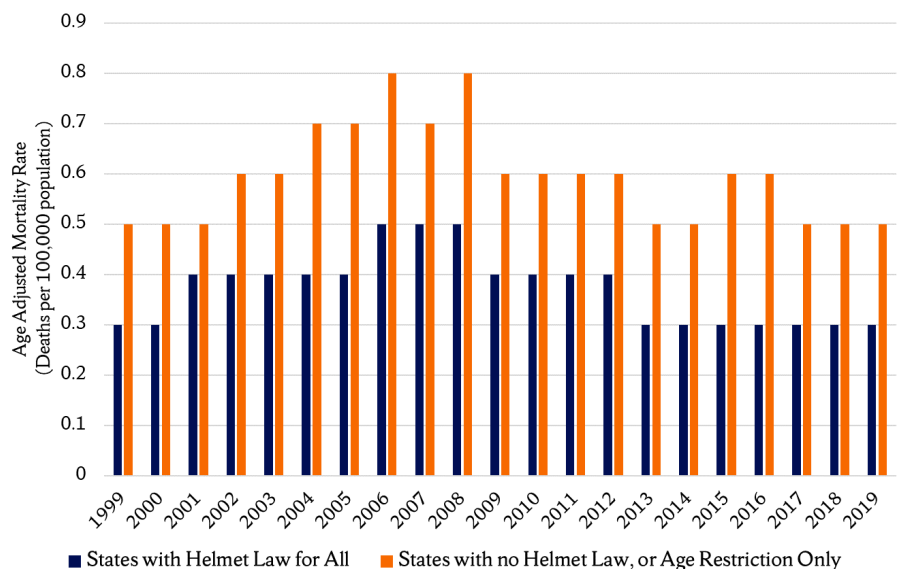


Figure 2: Head Injury Mortality Rates are Higher in States with No Helmet Laws

Data Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention