

Preventing Unintentional Injury: Keeping Our Youth Safe

Injuries are the primary cause of death for adolescents according to the Children's Safety Network. Injury deaths are classified as unintentional (such as auto crash fatalities) or intentional (homicide and suicide). Unintentional injuries make up the greatest proportion of deaths among adolescents both nationally and in Tennessee.

Tennessee Data

Unintentional injury remains the overwhelming leading cause of death for youth and young adults ages 10 to 24 years in Tennessee. The Tennessee Department of Health, HIT website indicates the rate of morbidity and mortality from accidents for 10-24 year olds was 60.83% in 2006. Data in the following section are from the HIT website.

Race Matters

- African-American males ages 10-24 were more likely to die from unintentional injuries (112.79%), compared to white males (85.49%), white females (31.70%), and African-American females at (19.70%) in 2006.
- White males ages 10-24 were more likely to die from motor vehicle accidents at a rate of 42.44% compared to African-American males (22.87%), white females (20.70%) and African-American females at (10.29%) in 2006.
- African-American males were much more likely to die from assault, particularly homicide at a rate of 63.10% compared to white males (6.73%), African-American females (6.33%), and white females at 1.72% in 2006.
- The number of adolescent deaths ages 10-24 due to injuries has decreased over the last decade. Deaths among this population decreased from 64.20% in 1996 to 60.83% in 2006.

Best Practices

- Parents – Parents have a key role in injury prevention. They provide the transportation and the financial and emotional support for sports and recreational activities, and are in control of the car keys and insurance. They provide role modeling with their own behavior and set boundaries with appropriate consequences related to alcohol and drug use, behavior and rules of the road.

- Schools – Schools have a responsibility to prevent injuries from occurring at school and school-sponsored events. They can also teach the skills needed to prevent unintentional injuries, violence and suicide in all domains and throughout their lives. They have the means to provide recreation injury prevention information to parents, students and athletic staff.
- Communities – Communities can integrate and tailor strategies to meet their unique needs and opportunities for injury prevention. It is important to involve relevant stakeholders in planning and implementation of safety plans to increase commitment and involvement in carrying out solutions. Graduated Drivers' License programs are a clear example of an injury prevention strategy established by policy.

Prevention Pays

- Motor vehicle crashes are expensive. In 2002, the economic cost of police-reported crashes (both fatal and nonfatal) involving drivers aged 15 to 20 was \$40.8 billion as reported by the CDC.
- If restraint use among motor vehicle occupants ages five years and older increased to 100%, an additional 9,000 lives would be saved and 160,000 nonfatal injuries would be prevented each year.
- Mass media campaigns that are carefully planned and executed can be effective in preventing alcohol-impaired driving. School-based educational programs decrease the number of young people who ride with alcohol-impaired drivers (www.thecommunityguide.org).
- Between 1982 and 2001, alcohol-related fatal crash rates among drivers 16 to 20 years of age decreased almost 60%, suggesting that prevention measures targeting underage drinkers have been effective.
- Multifaceted community-based booster seat campaigns increase booster seat use among child passengers in motor vehicles. Fifteen months after a CDC-funded campaign began, booster seat use had nearly doubled to 26% in the communities where the campaign was implemented.

Why Is Driving So Dangerous?

Teen driving is relatively deadly due to a combination of inexperience, overconfidence, risk-taking behavior and greater risk exposure.

- Teens have less experience behind the wheel than older drivers.
- Teens are less likely to wear seatbelts than older drivers.

- Teens are more likely to drive at night, with other teens as passengers, thus increasing the risks of distraction and the influence of peer pressure.

What Could Tennessee Do to Improve Motor Vehicle Safety for Adolescents?

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Community Guide to Preventive Services, Motor Vehicle Occupant Protection strongly recommends:

- Primary enforcement and enhanced, consistent enforcement of safety belt-use laws and alcohol/drug impaired driving laws (wearing seatbelts reduces the risk of a fatality by 45 percent and reduces the risk of a moderate to critical injury by half.
- Maximum .08 BAC for adult drivers.
- Sobriety checkpoints (e.g., on prom nights.)
- Hospitality employee training so that these employees can recognize underage or impaired drinkers.

Other states are exploring:

- Extending the length of time required for a learner's permit (e.g., North Carolina requires 365 days)
- Restricting the number of teen passengers
- Emphasizing school prevention programs, addressing alcohol use on college campuses
- Targeting judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers for special training on youth alcohol and substance use.

2010 Objectives

Alcohol-Related Motor Vehicle Deaths

- By 2010, reduce alcohol-related motor vehicle deaths among adolescents and young adults aged 15-24 to 5 per 100,000 from the 2003 baseline of 6.7 per 100,000.

Reduce Riding with Drinkers

- By 2010, reduce the proportion of high school students that rode, in the last 30 days, with a driver who had been drinking alcohol to 20% from the 2005 baseline of 25.1%.

Increase Seat Belt Use

- By 2010, increase the proportion of high school students who wear a seat belt most or all of the time to 92% from the 2005 baseline of 86.8%.

Reduce Teen Motor Vehicle Deaths

- By 2010, reduce motor vehicle deaths among adolescents aged 15-24 to 37 per 100,000 from the 2001 baseline of 42 per 100,000.

Websites

Alive @ 25: A Survival Course in Traffic Safety, by the
National Safety Council
www.aliveat25.com

Center for Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws
www.udetc.org

Children's Safety Network
www.childrensafetynetwork.org

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
www.madd.org

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
www.cdc.gov/ncipc

Tennessee Department of Health
Health Information Tennessee (HIT)
<http://hit.state.tn.us/mortality.aspx>

Tennessee Department of Health
Safety and Injury Control Program
<http://www2.state.tn.us/health/healthpromotion/index.html#Safety%20and%20Injury%20Control%20Program>

U. S. Motor Vehicle Injury Facts
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/whd2004/information/MV-Facts.pdf>