Restraint Use and Motorcycle Helmet Use Laws

Restraint Use Laws

The first mandatory belt use law was enacted in the New York in 1984. Adult belt use laws are now in effect in 49 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. The laws differ from State to State, according to the type and age of the vehicle, occupant age and seating position, etc. The goal of these laws is to promote belt use and thereby reduce deaths and injuries in motor vehicle crashes.

In 2024 there were 35 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico that had primary seat belt laws in effect, enabling law enforcement officers to stop vehicles and write citations when they observed violations of the seat belt law. In 14 States the laws specified secondary enforcement, meaning that law enforcement officers were permitted to write citations only after a vehicle was stopped for some other traffic infraction. New Hampshire is the only State without a seat belt law for adults, although it does have a primary child passenger safety law that covers all drivers and passengers younger than 18.

The first mandatory child restraint use law was implemented in Tennessee in 1978. Since 1985, all 50 States and the District of Columbia have had child restraint use laws in effect. Child restraint use laws differ from State to State, in terms of the ages of children covered and in other important ways, including height and weight limits, seating position requirements, and various exemptions and exceptions.

The most current information on seat belt laws and child passenger safety laws is available on the website of the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) at www.ghsa.org:

- Seat belt laws—www.ghsa.org/state-laws-issues/seat-belt-use
- Child passenger safety laws—www.ghsa.org/state-laws-issues/child-passengers.

In 2024 seat belt use rates in the United States ranged from 73.4 percent in Wyoming to 97.5 percent in California. Twenty-six States, and the District of Columbia achieved belt use rates of 90.0 percent or higher. These results are from probability-based observational surveys conducted by 50 States, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories. The nationwide seat belt use rate in 2024 was 91.2 percent, as measured by NHTSA's National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS). NOPUS is a national probability-based survey, which is independent from State belt use surveys. Observed seat belt use rates for the States and the Nation in 2024 can be found in *Seat Belt Use in 2024—Use Rates in the States and Territories*.

Motorcycle Helmet Use Laws

In 2024 there were 17 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico that required helmet use by all motorcyclists. In 30 States helmet use was required for only a subset of motorcyclists (typically, motorcyclists under age 18), and three States (Illinois, Iowa, and New Hampshire) do not require helmet use for motorcyclists of any age.

The most current information on helmet use laws is available on the GHSA website at www.ghsa.org/state-laws-issues/motorcyclists.

According to results from NOPUS, the overall rate of DOT-compliant motorcycle helmet use in the United States was 73.8 percent in 2023. Helmet use continued to be significantly higher in States that required all motorcyclists to be helmeted than in other States. In 2023 DOT compliant motorcycle helmet use in States requiring all to use helmets was 82.7 percent compared to 65.9 percent in other States. Information on motorcycle helmet use in 2023 can be found in *Motorcycle Helmet Use in 2023—Overall Results*. The 2024 results are not currently available.

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