



# Seat Belt Safety

Kentucky has a primary seat belt law, meaning drivers can be stopped and cited if *anyone* in the vehicle is not wearing a seat belt. Those in violation are subject to a fine. With the passage of the primary law, Kentucky's seat belt usage rate increased from 67.2 percent in 2006 to 80 percent in 2009. The national average is 84 percent.

## Top five myths and facts about seat belts

**Myth #1:** I don't need to wear a seat belt when driving at slow speeds or on short trips.

**Fact:** Most crash deaths occur within 25 miles of home and at speeds of less than 40 mph.

**Did You Know?** Fatal injuries to unrestrained motorists have occurred in vehicles traveling as slow as 12 mph. An unbelted person hitting a windshield in a 40-mph crash would feel the same force as hitting the ground after falling off a five-story building.



**Myth #2:** If I wear a seat belt, I might get trapped in my car if it catches on fire or becomes submerged under water.

**Fact:** Crashes involving fire or water occur in less than one half of one percent of all crashes. The greatest danger to vehicle occupants is from the impact of the crash itself.

**Did You Know?** Those wearing a seat belt are more likely to be uninjured and conscious after a crash, allowing them to get out of the vehicle quickly.

**Myth #3:** If I don't wear a seat belt I'm not affecting anyone but myself. If I'm injured or die in a crash from not wearing a seat belt, that's my business!

**Fact:** Deaths and injuries that result from non-use of seat belts cost everyone in the form of higher insurance premiums, medical costs, property damage, and loss of productivity. Plus, the emotional cost to victims' families is too great to measure.

**Did You Know?** Kentuckians pay over \$2 billion each year for car crash victims. Citizens not involved in crashes pay three-fourths of that cost.

**Myth #4:** I don't need to wear a seat belt because my vehicle has air bags.

**Fact:** Air bags are designed to work in combination with seat belts, providing supplemental protection during certain types of crashes. Seat belts help to properly position occupants to maximize the airbags' benefits and help restrain occupants during the initial impact and any following collisions.

**Did You Know?** Air bags inflate at a speed of over 100 mph. An unrestrained or improperly restrained occupant can be seriously injured or killed by the force of an activated air bag.



**The risk of injury is greater in the front seat for children, with or without an air bag. Research shows it is best for children age 12 and under to ALWAYS ride in the back seat.**

## Myth #5: I might be saved if I'm thrown clear of the crash.

**Fact:** Being thrown to safety in a crash is almost impossible. Your best bet for survival is to be securely held in place by the seat belt.

**Did You Know?** You are 25 times more likely to be killed in a crash when thrown from a vehicle. You may be thrown through the windshield and into another vehicle or fixed object, scraped along the pavement, or even crushed by your own vehicle.



**In Kentucky in 2009, there were 791 total highway fatalities. Of those fatalities, 649 were in motor vehicles. Over 60 percent of those killed were not properly restrained.**

## Do seat belts really help in a crash?

Yes! Seat belts are the most effective safety feature on vehicles; however, nearly one in five Americans fail to regularly wear their seat belts when driving or riding in a motor vehicle. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, seat belts reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat passenger car occupants by 45 percent and the risk of injury by 50 percent. For light truck occupants, seat belts reduce the risk of fatal injury by 60 percent and injury by 65 percent.



## How do I correctly wear a seat belt?

Properly fastened seat belts contact the strongest parts of the body, such as the chest, hips, and shoulders. This allows the restraint to spread crash forces over a wide area of the body, putting less stress on any one part.

A quick change in speed is what causes injury. A seat belt allows the body to slow down with the crash, extending the time when the crash forces are felt by the occupant.

### The Correct Way to Wear a Safety Belt

#### WEAR IT LOW

■ The lap portion of the safety belt should be two to four inches below the waist, snug across your hip and pelvic bones — NOT across your stomach.

■ In a crash, a belt worn too high on the abdomen places you at high risk of potentially fatal internal injuries.



#### WEAR IT SNUG

■ The shoulder portion should rest smoothly over your collarbone and across your chest and shoulders. Pull the belt out and let it retract to remove slack.

■ Safety belt webbing will stretch slightly in a crash. If not snug before the crash, you may slide under and out or up and over the belt.



#### WEAR IT RIGHT

■ If the belt rubs against the neck, try changing the seat position or the way you sit.

■ Some vehicles have a shoulder belt adjusters which slide up or down to provide a correct, comfortable fit.

Belt extenders may also be purchased.

■ Some cars feature a shoulder belt that automatically comes across your chest, but you must fasten the lap portion manually to achieve proper use.

■ Safety belts should be worn over the front of the shoulder, never behind your back or under your arm.

