

Avoiding & Preventing Road Traffic Collision

Road crashes kill 1.24 million people each year¹ and injure or disable 50 million more.

Of those fatalities, 91% occur on the roads in low-income and middle-income countries, and 50% of those who die are pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists¹

In some countries 1 out of 10 hospital beds is occupied by the victim of a car crash.

Road crashes are far and away the commonest cause of death in travellers. In some countries the risk of being in an accident is between 20 and 30 times greater than in the UK. In developed countries it is mainly drivers who get killed, but in developing countries nearly as many pedestrians are killed as drivers and vehicle occupants.

There is a great deal you can do to reduce the risk of being hurt or killed in a road crash or of avoiding hurting or killing others.

Many seasoned travellers develop the attitude that the suggestions below are often not practicable and that living in a different culture means you have to change your expectations. This attitude increases your vulnerability to becoming a road crash victim.

How to Prevent Road Traffic Collisions

1. General Advice

- Fit and wear seat belts in both front and rear seats, and ensure that all, including children, use them at all times. Remember that unstrapped back-seat passengers can kill those in the front seat. Wearing seat belts, even for the shortest journeys, is probably the single most important health precaution you can take wherever you are in the world. If you are in the front seat it cuts your risk of dying by 40-50% and in the back seat by between 25-75%¹
- Ensure any vehicle you travel in is well maintained. Before your journey check that the tyres (including the spare) are in good condition, that the water, fuel and oil levels are adequate, and that seat belts, brakes, windscreen wipers and lights (including indicators) work properly.
- Make sure you have necessary equipment and spares in the vehicle: first-aid kit, torch, spare tyre, equipment for tyre changing, spare fuel, tow rope, fire extinguisher, communication equipment, warning triangle, fluorescent jacket (worn whenever a stop is made by the side of the road) and necessary documentation. You should also consider food, fluid, and blankets if going on longer journeys, plus leather gloves may be useful if you need to extract someone from a collision. Consider carrying a grab bag with you if travelling in high-risk environments. This should contain essential supplies to keep you going for 24hrs.
- Before you set off check your first-aid kit is fit for purpose and ensure that its contents are regularly reviewed and replenished as necessary.
- Equipment should be appropriately secured in the vehicle so that it does not cause injury in case of an accident.
- If possible avoid travelling at night. If you must travel at night, allow plenty of time for the journey and lower your speed. Many vehicles may not have working front or rear lights and you may only spot them when you get very close. In many countries animals may roam freely on the roads.

- Try and keep adequate space between your vehicle and the one in front at all times.
- Ensure the vehicle is driven at a speed appropriate for the vehicle, terrain and the weather. Speed limits should be observed at all times.
- Make sure that the vehicle is appropriate for the terrain it is to be driven on.
- Motorcyclists should wear crash helmets (or change to a safer form of transport), even for the shortest journeys. Wearing a motorcycle helmet correctly can reduce the risk of death by almost 40% and the risk of severe injury by over 70%¹. Also ensure you are capable of riding a motor bike and have experience of doing so, don't just jump on one and go!
- When crossing the road remember the direction of traffic flow. Take special care of children if visiting a city after living in a rural area.

2. If someone else is driving

- Make sure any driver you employ, personally or for a project, is both licensed and competent to drive.
- Choose drivers, taxis and rickshaws with care, and as far as your ingenuity allows, make sure that lights, tyres and brakes are in good order before setting out. Ensure your driver is alert and not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. 'Close-face bargaining' can enable you to observe dilated pupils, and smell breath.
- When travelling as a passenger be alert to the care being taken by the driver and if uncomfortable with how they are driving raise it with them.

3. If you are driving

- Try to avoid driving when tired, feverish, jet-lagged, for prolonged periods, or at night. Ideally always have a co-driver. You should take a break or change driver every 2 hours, 4 hours at a maximum.
- Keep well hydrated and take food with you to replenish your energy levels.
- Never drink alcohol or take recreational drugs and then drive, or drive when taking medicines that make you drowsy. Check the labelling of any medications that you are taking.
- Leave plenty of time for journeys so you are not in a hurry. Research your route well before setting off, and allow extra time for unexpected delays. Plan to have reached your destination one hour before sunset to allow for any problems on the road.
- Don't use mobile (cell) phones or 2 way radios when driving, or fiddle with other equipment.

If you witness, or are involved in, a Road Traffic Collision

- Ensure that you understand the best course of action for the context you are travelling in. In some countries it will be appropriate to stop and in others it may not be, with the advice being to continue to the nearest police or military post. Whatever the context always assess the situation to see if it is safe for you and your colleagues before exiting your vehicle.
- Protect the scene by strategically positioning your vehicle or stop the traffic. If you have one, place a warning triangle to warn other road users.
- Turn off engines and apply the handbrakes of any vehicles involved, but be aware of the potential threat of un-deployed airbags.
- Conduct a thorough search of the area. Casualties may be thrown some distance from the scene of the collision itself.

- If you were involved in the collision, check yourself for any obvious injuries and be aware of any pain you have. Try to avoid moving around too much if the impact was significant. Always find a way to be checked out by a doctor after physical impact.
- Assess injuries of others and provide first aid assistance as necessary.
- Report to the police immediately and cooperate as necessary.
- If working internationally report the incident to your office.
- Photograph the scene if it is safe to do so.
- If you have to leave your vehicle at the scene, strip it of valuables, antennas and radios and remove logo stickers if possible.
- Do not admit fault or sign anything. If you are asked to make a statement, communicate the facts only.

Your psychological response

- Traumatic stress responses are normal.
- Give yourself time. When you experience something traumatic, you can feel out of control and struggle to make sense of the chaos. It takes time - weeks or months - to accept what has happened and to learn to live with it.
- Distressing events that shatter the way we see ourselves can evoke a loss of meaning, purpose and hope. You may need to grieve for what you have lost.
- It can help to spend time with others who have been through a similar experience to you.
- Ask for support - Most people who experience a traumatic event need support and understanding from those around them to help them recover. Sometimes you will want to be with other people, but not to talk about what has happened.
- Take some time for yourself.
- Don't avoid talking about it. It can be a relief to talk about what happened. Take things at a pace that you feel comfortable with. You don't need to wallow in it but it is unhelpful to avoid it.
- Get into a routine. Exercise, have regular meals and eat a balanced diet. Don't force yourself but aim to re-establish a routine.

References, Further Guidance and Information

¹ WHO: "Global status report on road safety 2013: supporting a decade of action"

More information can be found in: 'The Traveller's Good Health Guide', Ted Lankester; 3rd Edition 2006



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