

Traffic Safety Facts 1997

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration



Children



In 1997, there were almost 58 million children under 15 years old in the United States. This age group (0-14 years) made up 22 percent of the total U.S. resident population in 1997.

Motor vehicle crashes are the **leading cause of death** for children of every age from 6 to 14 years old (based on 1994 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics).

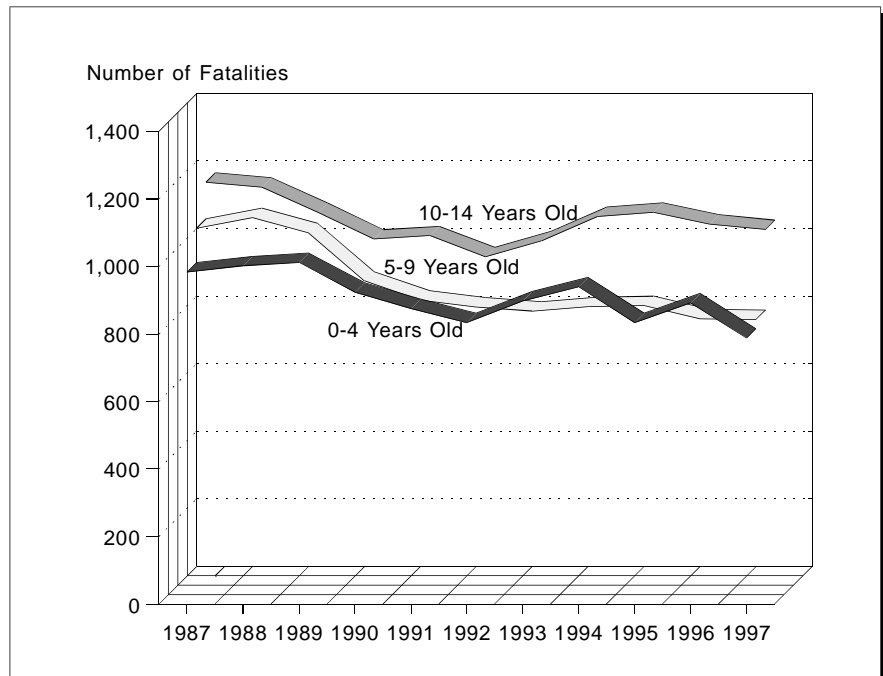
In 1997, there were a total of 41,967 traffic fatalities in the United States. The 0-14 age group accounted for 6 percent (2,656) of those traffic fatalities. In addition, children under 15 years old accounted for 5 percent (1,791) of all vehicle **occupant fatalities**, 10 percent (331,000) of all the **people injured** in motor vehicle crashes, and 9 percent (282,000) of all the vehicle occupants injured in crashes.

In the United States, an average of 7 children 0-14 years old were killed and 908 were injured every day in motor vehicle crashes during 1997.

In the 0-14 year age group, males accounted for 56 percent of the fatalities and 49 percent of those injured in motor vehicle crashes during 1997.

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children from 6 to 14 years old.”

Figure 1. Total Traffic Fatalities Among Children 0-14 Years Old by Age Group, 1987-1997



Child Endangerment

In 1997, 21 percent of the children under 15 years old who were killed in motor vehicle crashes were killed in alcohol-related crashes.

Of the children 0-14 years old who were killed in alcohol-related crashes during 1997, almost half (261) were passengers in vehicles with drivers who had been drinking, with blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels of 0.01 gram per deciliter (g/dl) or higher. An additional 137 children were killed as passengers in vehicles with drivers who had not been drinking.

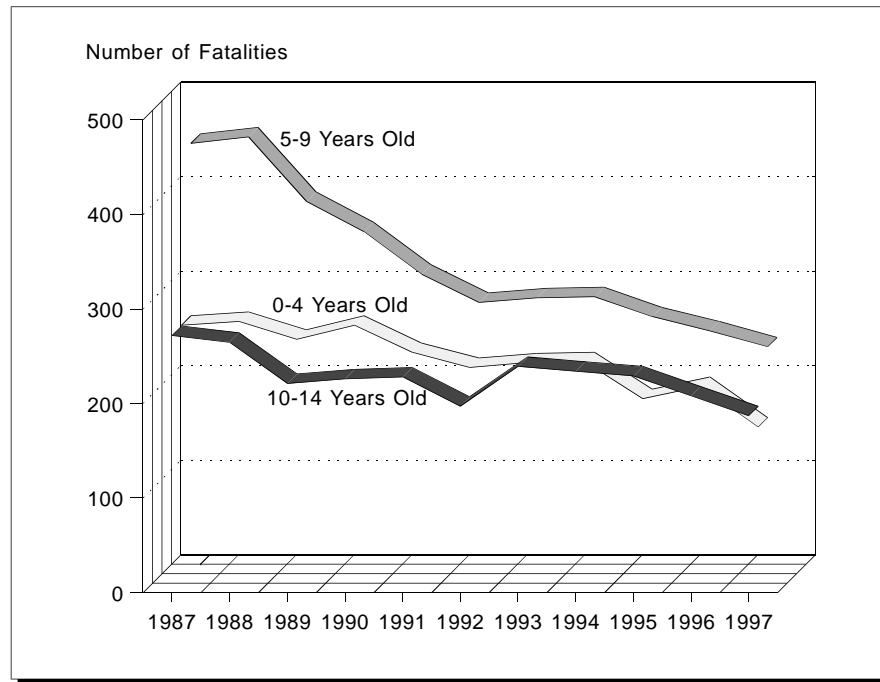
Another 93 children under 15 years old who were killed in traffic crashes in 1997 were pedestrians or pedalcyclists who were struck by drinking drivers (BAC ≥0.01 g/dl).

Pedestrians

In 1987, there were 1,000 pedestrian fatalities in the 0-14 year age group. From 1987 to 1997, the number of pedestrian fatalities in this age group decreased by 41 percent, with the 5-9 year age group showing the largest decrease.

“In 1997, 21 percent of the children under 15 years old killed in crashes were killed in alcohol-related crashes.”

Figure 2. Total Pedestrian Fatalities Among Children 0-14 Years Old by Age Group, 1987-1997



There were 5,307 pedestrian fatalities in 1997. The 0-14 age group accounted for 592 (11 percent) of those fatalities, and 60 percent of the pedestrian fatalities in this age group were males.

In addition to the pedestrians under 15 years old who died, 24,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes. These young pedestrians accounted for 31 percent of the total pedestrians injured in motor vehicle crashes in 1997.

More than one-fifth (22 percent) of the traffic fatalities in the 0-14 year age group were pedestrians.

During 1997, 41 percent of the young pedestrian fatalities occurred between the hours of 4 pm and 8 pm, and 83 percent occurred at non-intersection locations.

Pedalcyclists

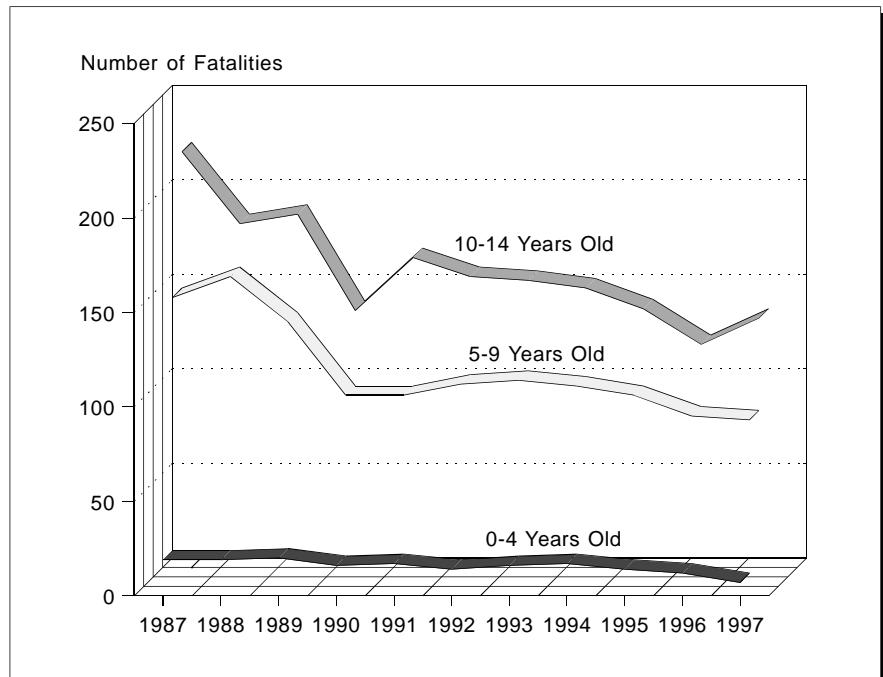
A total of 813 pedalcyclists were killed in motor vehicle crashes in 1997. Children 0-14 years old accounted for 232 (29 percent) of those fatalities.

In 1997, 40 percent of the pedalcyclists injured in motor vehicle crashes were under 15 years old.

The 232 pedalcyclist fatalities in 1997 for the 0-14 year age group represent a decrease of 42 percent from the 397 killed in 1987.

“In 1997, 40 percent of the pedalcyclists injured in motor vehicle crashes were under 15 years old.”

Figure 3. Total Pedalcyclist Fatalities Among Children 0-14 Years Old by Age Group, 1987-1997



Bicycle helmets are 85 to 88 percent effective in mitigating head and brain injuries in all types of bicycle incidents, making the use of helmets the **single most effective countermeasure** available to reduce head injuries and fatalities resulting from bicycle crashes. (Source: Robert Thompson, *A Case Control Study of the Effectiveness of Bicycle Safety Helmets*. Centers for Disease Control.)

Restraints

Research has shown that lap/shoulder safety belts, when used, **reduce the risk of fatal injury** to front seat occupants (age 5 years and older) of passenger cars by 45 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 50 percent. For light truck occupants, safety belts reduce the risk of fatal injury by 60 percent and the risk of moderate-to-critical injury by 65 percent.

During 1997, 9,069 motor vehicle occupants under 15 years old were involved in fatal crashes. For those children, where restraint use was known, 46 percent were unrestrained; among those who were fatally injured, 63 percent were unrestrained.

Table 1. Restraint Use by Motor Vehicle Occupants Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age Group, 1997

	Age Group (Years)					Total
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	All Other	
Percentage Unrestrained	35	46	57	57	43	46

Research on the effectiveness of child safety seats has found that they reduce the risk of fatal injury by 69 percent for infants (less than 1 year old) and by 47 percent for toddlers (1-4 years old).

In 1997, there were 604 occupant fatalities among children under 5 years of age. Of those 604 fatalities, an estimated 329 (54 percent) were totally unrestrained.

Table 2. Children Under 5 Years Old Fatally Injured in Motor Vehicle Crashes by Age Group and Type of Restraint, 1997

Type of Restraint	Infants (Under Age 1)	Toddlers (Age 1-4)	Total
None Used	62	266	329
Child Seat	71	123	194
Adult Seat Belt	2	79	81
Total	135	469	604

Note: In this table, fatalities with unknown restraint use have been distributed proportionally across the known restraint use categories.

From 1975 through 1997, an estimated 3,894 lives were saved by the use of child restraints (child safety seats or adult belts). In 1997, an estimated 312 children under age 5 were saved as a result of child restraint use.

If 100 percent of motor vehicle occupants under 5 years old were protected by child safety seats, an estimated 495 lives (that is, an additional 183) could have been saved in 1997.

“Child safety seats reduce the risk of fatal injury by 69 percent for infants and by 47 percent for toddlers.”

In 1996, NHTSA conducted the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS). One of the studies in the survey was the Controlled Intersection Study, which provided more detailed information about child restraint use for children under 5 years old.

Table 3. Restraint Use by Children Under 5 Years Old

Grouping	Restraint Use (Percent)	Grouping	Restraint Use (Percent)
Overall	61.2	Rush Hour	55.2
Infants (<1 Year)	85.2	Non-Rush Hour	62.0
Toddlers (1 to 4 Years)	60.1	Weekday	62.2
Passenger Cars	56.5	Weekend	52.6
Light Trucks	68.7	City	68.9
Front Seat	61.0	Suburban	78.6
Back Seat	61.5	Rural	35.6

“Children in rear-facing child seats should not be placed in the front seat of vehicles with passenger air bags. The impact of a deploying air bag on a rear-facing child seat could injure the child.”

Failure to read the child safety seat instructions, in addition to vehicle owner manual instructions regarding safety belts, could result in serious injury or death as a result of a failure of the child safety seat to be securely and/or properly restrained.

Children in rear-facing child seats **should not** be placed in the front seat of vehicles equipped with passenger-side air bags. The impact of a deploying air bag striking a rear-facing child seat could result in injury to the child. NHTSA also recommends that children 12 and under sit in the rear seat away from the force of a deploying air bag.

For more information:

Information on youth safety is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. Telephone inquiries should be addressed to Ms. Louann Hall at 1-800-934-8517. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/nca>. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.