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# A Bad Year For Walkers: Pedestrian Deaths Surged During Pandemic Despite Drop In Driving



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The safety trends for people walking on U.S. roads are not good. Both the total number of deaths and the rate of death based on miles driven soared in 2020. Drivers struck and killed an estimated 6,721 people on foot last year, and “a shocking and unprecedented” 21% spike in the pedestrian fatality rate from 2019 to 2020 was the largest ever annual increase as a result of traffic crashes since the government’s tracking system was established in 1975.

The likely causes for the surge include reckless and dangerous driving like speeding, drunk and drugged driving, and distraction, which were rampant on U.S. roads during the Covid-19 pandemic, even though overall driving was down.

Those are some of the highlights of “[Pedestrian Traffic Fatalities by State: 2020 Preliminary Data Addendum](#)” released on Thursday by the [Governors Highway Safety Association](#) (GHSA), a nonprofit organization representing state highway safety offices.

“Last year was filled with so much death and loss as Covid swept across the country,” Jonathan Adkins, executive director of the GHSA, said in a statement.

[In March](#) the safety group [released data for the first six months](#) of 2020; the addendum includes new data for the entire year. Both analyses were fatality projections comparing 2020 to 2019 based on preliminary state-by-state data.

“We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to these unacceptable numbers of pedestrian deaths,” Richard Retting of Sam Schwartz Consulting, who conducted the data analysis for both the original report and the addendum, said in a statement.

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## Pedestrian Traffic Fatalities by State

2020 PRELIMINARY DATA ADDENDUM

**Table 2**

**Pedestrian Fatalities by State, Jan-Dec 2019 & 2020**

Sources: State Highway Safety Offices and GHSA data analysis

Sorted by Percentage Change

State	Jan-Dec 2019	Jan-Dec 2020 (Projected)	Change from 2019 to 2020	
			#	%
Kansas	18	49	31	172%
Vermont	9	8	5	167%
Rhode Island	8	18	10	125%
Alaska	6	13	7	118%
South Dakota	8	14	6	75%
New Hampshire	10	16	6	60%
North Dakota	5	8	3	60%
Mississippi	67	104	37	55%
Arkansas	61	91	30	49%
District of Columbia	9	13	4	44%
Indiana	75	103	28	37%
Nevada	69	89	19	27%
Connecticut	53	65	12	23%
Iowa	22	27	5	23%
Colorado	76	92	16	21%
Ohio	128	154	26	20%
Michigan	149	177	28	19%
Maryland	125	147	22	18%
Tennessee	148	172	24	16%
Georgia	239	273	34	14%
Missouri	111	124	13	12%
Louisiana	122	138	16	11%
North Carolina	238	263	25	11%
South Carolina	164	180	16	10%
New Jersey	175	191	16	9%
Texas	661	723	62	9%
Washington	101	110	9	9%
Kentucky	77	82	5	6%
Montana	17	18	1	6%
Arizona	220	225	5	2%
California	1,020	1,026	6	1%
New Mexico	83	84	1	1%
Florida	745	729	-16	-2%
Wisconsin	53	52	-1	-2%
Minnesota	50	47	-3	-6%
Oregon	85	80	-5	-6%
Pennsylvania	154	145	-9	-6%
Virginia	124	114	-10	-8%
Illinois	171	155	-16	-9%
Oklahoma	88	80	-8	-9%
Utah	38	34	-4	-10%
Idaho	14	12	-2	-14%
Nebraska	20	17	-3	-15%
Alabama	114	98	-16	-14%
New York	286	235	-51	-18%
Wyoming	10	8	-2	-20%
Massachusetts	76	53	-23	-30%
West Virginia	32	22	-10	-31%
Hawaii	37	20	-17	-46%
Delaware	32	17	-15	-47%
Maine	17	9	-8	-47%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,412</b>	<b>6,721</b>	<b>309</b>	<b>4.8%</b>

Percentage Change Up

Percentage Change Down

- **Pedestrians accounted for 17% of all traffic deaths in 2019, compared to 13% in 2010.** Pedestrian deaths have risen by 46% over the past decade, but the number of all other traffic deaths increased by only 5%.
- Drivers struck and killed a **larger proportion of Black, Indigenous and People of Color** traveling on foot than expected based on their respective share of the population.
- Most pedestrians are killed on **local roads, in the dark and away from intersections.** During the past 10 years, the number of drivers hitting and killing a pedestrian after dark increased by 54%, compared to a 16% rise in pedestrian fatalities during the day.
- Driver and/or pedestrian **alcohol impairment** was reported in nearly half of traffic crashes that resulted in a pedestrian fatality.
- Sport utility vehicles (SUVs) cause **more serious and fatal pedestrian injuries than passenger cars**, the largest category of vehicles in fatal pedestrian crashes, and during the past decade that number increased at a faster rate than those involving passenger cars.

Despite the troubling statistics in the overall increase in pedestrian fatalities, there was some good news: Nineteen states experienced a decrease in the number of walkers killed by drivers in 2020, and eleven states reported double-digit declines.

The earlier report also highlighted strategies known to be effective to reduce crashes and injuries.

These include: engineering and road design improvements like safer crossings and better lighting; traffic safety enforcement by police;

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“As America gets vaccinated and returns to normal, we need to treat pedestrian safety like the public health emergency that it is,” Adkins added. “We must strengthen our efforts to protect those on foot from traffic violence by implementing equitable and proven countermeasures that protect people walking and address those driving behaviors that pose the greatest risk.”

To access the earlier full report and the new addendum, click [here](#).

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