

Occupant Protection Frequently Asked Questions

What does Minnesota's seat belt law require?

Minnesota law requires all drivers and passengers to wear seat belts or be in the correct car seat or booster seat. Seat belts should be tight across the hips or thighs, and the shoulder belt must be properly positioned across the chest—never tucked under the arm or behind the back.

What if my vehicle doesn't have a seat belt?

If your vehicle did not come with a factory-installed seatbelt (usually those manufactured before January 1, 1965), then your vehicle is exempt from the seat belt and child passenger safety law. In this case, there would not be a safe way to transport your child.

Can I be stopped and ticketed if law enforcement sees that I or one of my passengers are not properly restrained?

Yes. Minnesota's seat belt law is a primary offense, meaning that drivers and passengers in all seating positions—including the backseat—must be buckled up or in the correct child restraint. Law enforcement can stop and ticket unbelted drivers or passengers. A seat belt ticket costs \$25 but may exceed \$100 with fees. Drivers will be ticketed for unbelted passengers ages 14 and younger. Unbelted passengers aged 15 and older will be ticketed directly.

View the [seat belt law here](#).

The state's updated [car seat and booster seat law](#) took effect on August 1, 2024.

What is the law in other states?

While you and all passengers should always be properly restrained, as of October 2024, these are the current seat belt laws in the U.S. Always check for the most current information:

- 35 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have primary seat belt laws for front seat occupants.
- 14 states have secondary laws for adult front seat occupants.
- 41 states, D.C., and 2 territories have laws enforcing rear seat belt use:
 - 18 states, D.C., and 2 territories have primary enforcement for all occupants.
 - 5 states have primary enforcement for youth.
 - 11 states include rear seats as secondary enforcement (three of these are states with primary seat belt laws for front seat occupants; six have secondary laws for adult front seat occupants).
 - 10 states do not have laws enforcing rear seat belt use.
- Of the states with primary front seat belt laws, 11 states and the Virgin Islands do not include rear seats.
- Of the states with secondary front seat belt laws, 9 states do not include rear seats.
- New Hampshire has neither a primary nor a secondary seat belt law for adults in any seat, although it does have a primary child passenger safety law that covers all drivers and passengers under 18.

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What percentage of Minnesota drivers wear seat belts?

The 2024 seat belt survey showed that the percentage of people buckling up in Minnesota reached a near all-time high of 94.7% this year, marking the highest rate in a decade and up 0.5% from 2023.

What groups are least likely to wear their seat belts?

Young males ages 16 to 29 are the least likely to wear seat belts. However, the September 2024 Minnesota seat belt survey indicated that the percentage of young adults buckling up rose to a 10-year high of 93.6%. Pickup drivers also reached an all-time high of 91.9% for seat belt use.

Do I need to wear a seat belt if I'm only driving a short distance?

Yes. You should wear a seat belt every time you are a driver or passenger. Most fatal crashes happen within 25 miles from home.

I do most of my driving on rural roads where there isn't a lot of traffic. Is a seat belt really necessary?

According to the Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety, while 80 counties in rural Minnesota represent just half of the state's population, they accounted for 56% of traffic fatalities in 2022. Nationally, in 2022, there were 12,486 passenger vehicle occupant fatalities in rural areas and 12,865 in urban locations. Of those fatalities, 51% of those killed in rural locations were not wearing seat belts, compared to 48% in urban areas.

If I have airbags, do I need to wear a seat belt?

Yes, the safest way to ride is buckled up in a vehicle equipped with airbags. Even without an airbag, you are safer buckled up than if you have an airbag and are not buckled. And remember, it's the law in Minnesota.

Could being belted in during a crash make it harder to escape if the vehicle is on fire or going underwater?

Incidents involving fire or water account for only ½ of 1% of all crashes. More importantly, you cannot escape such dangers unless you're conscious. Wearing a seat belt greatly increases your chances of staying conscious and able-bodied. Remember, it's the law in Minnesota.

If most of my trips are on city streets with slower speeds, is it necessary to wear a seat belt?

Seemingly routine trips can be deceptively dangerous. Most fatal crashes occur within 25 miles from home and at speeds of less than 40 mph. Keep in mind that seat belts are the law in Minnesota.

If I buckle my kids in and choose not to wear my own seat belt, is that okay?

It's crucial for adults to set a good example by wearing their seat belts. When parents ride without their seat belts, child restraint use drops by 40%. Additionally, 39% of kids under age 14 who die in crashes were not properly restrained. Seat belts or proper safety seats for every occupant are required by law in Minnesota.

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Isn't it better to be thrown clear in a crash?

Being thrown clear in a crash is almost impossible. If you are thrown, you may go through the windshield, be scraped along the pavement, or even crushed by your own vehicle or another one. The idea of being thrown from a car and gently landing in a grassy area is a fantasy. Your best bet in a crash is to stay inside the vehicle, securely held by your seat belt.

If I'm a young, healthy guy with a clean driving record, why do I need to wear a seat belt?

Young men are the most at risk. Among male passenger vehicle occupants ages 18-34 who were killed in 2017 fatal crashes, 60% were not buckled. Additionally, you cannot control the actions of other drivers. The statistics related to motor vehicle crashes and drunk driving are devastating. Even if you are driving defensively, a drunk driver coming around the next curve may not be. Play it safe: buckle up every trip, every time. It's the law in Minnesota.

Since I drive a pickup truck, I'm safer and don't need to wear a seat belt, right?

The numbers tell a different story: 61% of pickup truck occupants who were killed in 2022 were not buckled, compared to 47% of passenger car occupants. For occupants in SUVs, pickups, and vans, seat belts reduce the risk of fatal injury to the driver and front-seat passenger by 60%. Regardless of vehicle type, seat belt use is the single most effective way to stay alive in a crash.

Isn't there a risk that I'll be injured by the seat belt in certain kinds of crashes?

In a crash, everything in your car can cause bodily harm; your seat belt is one of the few things that can actually save you.

If I usually ride in the backseat, do I need to wear a seat belt?

Too many people mistakenly believe they are safe in the back seat without a seat belt. Remember, it's the law in Minnesota that every passenger, including those in the backseat, must be properly restrained. Nationally, 48% of all front-seat passenger vehicle occupants killed in crashes in 2022 were unrestrained, while 59% of those killed in back seats were unrestrained.

