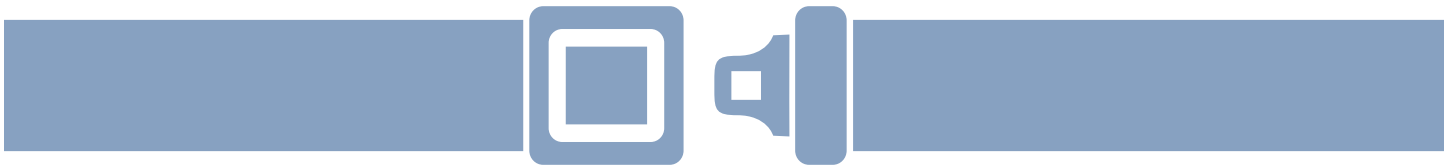




Seat Belt Use in North Dakota



The Problem

The number one contributing behavioral factor in motor vehicle deaths is not wearing a seat belt. An annual survey of observed seat belt use in North Dakota in 2024 shows that nearly eight out of every 10 people wear a seat belt (79.8%).¹ This means approximately 20% – about 156,000 people – are still not buckling up and it's these individuals who are much more likely to lose their life in a crash.

Seat belts are the single most effective safety device to prevent death and injury in a motor vehicle crash. Seat belts:²

- Prevent collision with other occupants of the vehicle
- Keep people in the vehicle
- Spread the force of impact over a large area and the strongest part of the body
- Allow a person's body to slow down gradually, lessening the impact on internal organs
- Prevent impact with the interior of the vehicle
- Prevent trauma to the brain and spinal cord caused by sudden change in motion



Prepared by North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) Highway Safety Division and Vision Zero Partners

Key statistics for unbelted motor vehicle fatalities.³

In 2023, there were more than 10,475 vehicle crashes in North Dakota resulting in fatalities, injuries and property damage.

One-year snapshot (2023)

ABOUT EVERY
10 DAYS
one unbelted vehicle occupant died (ND 2023)

ABOUT EVERY
14 DAYS
one unbelted vehicle occupant was ejected (ND 2023)

- 47% of fatalities were not wearing their seat belt (excludes those where seat belts do not apply including pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles and off-highway vehicles).
- 64% of unbelted fatalities were partially or totally ejected.
- 67% of fatalities from single vehicle rollover crashes were not wearing their seat belt and 82% of the unbelted rollover fatalities were either partially or totally ejected.

Five-year snapshot (2019-2023)

- In North Dakota over the past five years, more than half (53%) of the people killed in a motor vehicle crash, where seat belts were available, were not buckled at the time of the crash.
- 79% of the unbelted fatalities were males.

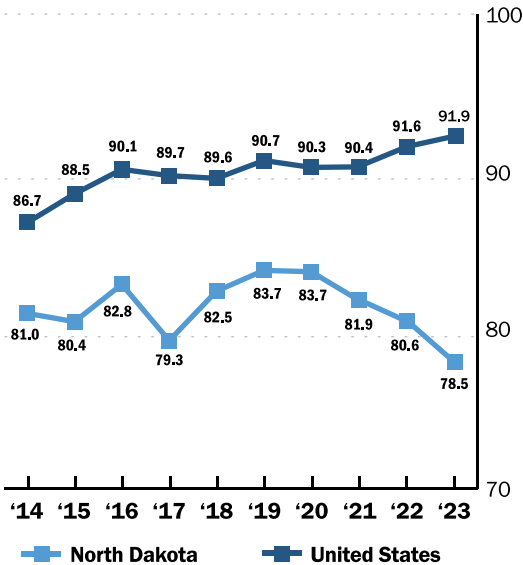
North Dakota Unbelted Motor Vehicle Fatalities, 2019-2023

Year	Fatalities*	No Seat Belt Used	Percent Unbelted
2019	74	34	46%
2020	68	41	60%
2021	80	37	46%
2022	68	47	69%
2023	76	36	47%

*Includes fatalities where seat belts were available within the vehicle. Excludes fatalities where seat belts do not apply (pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles, off-highway vehicles, persons riding on the exterior of motor vehicles, bus passengers and farm/construction equipment).

North Dakota’s observed seat belt use rate has been consistently lower than the national seat belt use rate over the past 10 years (2014–2023).^{3, 4}

North Dakota vs. United States Seat Belt Use Rate, 2014–2023^{3, 4}



The Cost

Seat belt use is not just a personal choice.

While some individuals consider seat belt use to be a personal choice, it is a choice that affects nearly everyone – including North Dakota taxpayers.

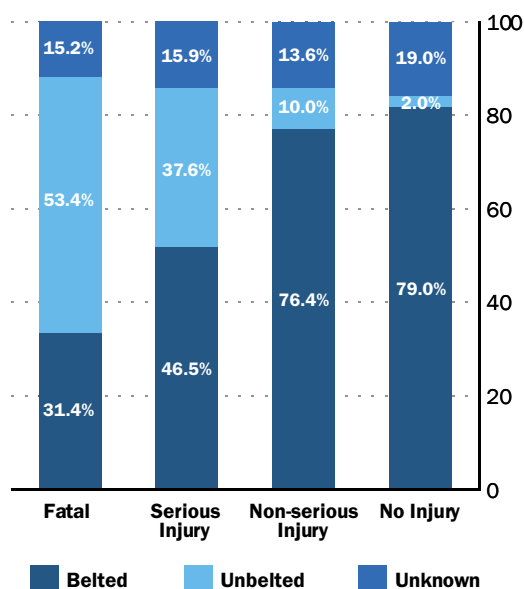
Unbelted motor vehicle crashes have a high cost to North Dakota.

Motor vehicle crash deaths and injuries resonate beyond the victim and their families. There is also a cost to each North Dakota taxpayer in terms of emergency response, medical assistance, increased insurance premiums, unemployment compensation and more.

Seat belt use and injury severity: Direct correlation.

Unbelted vehicle occupants in crashes in North Dakota account for the largest percent of fatalities and serious injuries, while belted occupants most commonly receive non-serious or no injuries.

North Dakota Percent of Restraint Use by Injury Classification, 2019–2023³



Unbelted crash victims have 50% higher medical bills.

Research has shown that unbelted crash victims have medical bills 50% higher than belted crash victims.⁴

The Solution

North Dakota's primary seat belt law.

On August 1, 2023, North Dakota's seat belt law moved from secondary to primary enforcement. The updated law allows law enforcement to stop and issue a seat belt citation to someone not wearing a seat belt and requires all front and back seat occupants to be buckled up regardless of age.

Progress toward zero unbelted fatalities in North Dakota.

The primary seat belt law has been in place for just a short time and has already demonstrated some preliminary positive impact over the first 11 months (August 2023 – June 2024).

- The Annual North Dakota Observational Seat Belt Survey shows that there has been an increase in seat belt use from 78.5% in June 2023 to 79.8% in June 2024.
- The number of unbelted fatalities has decreased from 21 in August 2023 to eight in June 2024.

Zero fatalities. Zero excuses.

Vision Zero's mission is to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries on North Dakota roadways by creating a culture of shared responsibility where crashes are recognized as preventable. This means addressing both the causes of crashes and the extent of human injuries and fatalities when crashes occur. Eliminating traffic deaths caused by preventable human behaviors, including not wearing a seat belt, is one way North Dakota can reach zero. When it comes to your family, friends and members of your community, zero is the only acceptable number. Buckle up. Every Seat, every trip, every time!

Seat Belts Save Lives

VisionZero.ND.gov

¹ North Dakota State University Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute and the NDDOT Highway Safety Division

² National Safety Council

³ NDDOT Highway Safety Division

⁴ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration