
NTDB™ data points

To ride or not to ride

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In the last few months, this column has focused on motor vehicle driver-related injury. But just how safe is it to ride in a car? When looking at the motor vehicle passenger-related deaths contained in the second annual report of The National Trauma Data Bank™ (NTDB), we see a familiar trend. Readily visible in the figure accompanying this column is a bimodal distribution of passenger deaths. This information may be directly related to what we have previously reported.

New teenage drivers often have passengers of similar age. One of the contributing factors to motor vehicle crashes is distraction within the vehicle. This distraction is a major reason for the graduated driver's license restriction on the number of passengers that may ride with a new driver. A newly acquired skill is hard enough to perform without someone next to you taking your mind off of the task at hand. It is not difficult to see how this negative interaction would result in the first peak on our graph at right.

In order to make headway in reducing this peak, we need to focus education and prevention strategies at this population of drivers and passengers. One can not stress enough the importance of wearing seat belts. Society is in the early phase of em-



Number of passenger deaths due to motor vehicle crashes for both men and women at each age range from 0 to 105. Total N = 30,839.

bracing seat belt use as well as condemning drinking and driving. But we still have a long road ahead of us. Time will tell whether we have been successful in reducing these deaths. The NTDB continues to accrue trauma records every year and this will allow us to track this trend and hopefully witness a downturn.

The second peak appears at the same age range as it does for driver deaths. This peak correlates with an increase in the comorbid factors that are seen in the elderly. This is directly related to a reduced physiologic reserve. Major injuries may be fatal as with passengers of any age, but crashes that produce less

physical injury may still result in death in this age group. Better engineering of motor vehicles along with expanded trauma system coverage and improved access to trauma care will be necessary to reduce this peak.

Throughout the year we will be highlighting these data through brief reports that will be found monthly in the *Bulletin*. For a complete copy of the National Trauma Data Bank *Annual Report 2002*, visit us at <http://www.facs.org/trauma/ntdbannualreport2002.pdf>. If you are interested in submitting your trauma center's data, please contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.