

NHTSA: Traffic deaths rise again as drivers take risks

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In this March 31, 2021 file photo, traffic flows along Interstate 90 highway as a Metra suburban commuter train moves along an elevated track in Chicago. The government's road safety agency reported Thursday, Sept. 2, that U.S. traffic deaths in the first quarter of 2021 rose by 10.5% over last year, even as driving has declined. Credit: AP Photo/Shafkat Anowar, File

U.S. traffic deaths in the first quarter of 2021 rose by 10.5% over last year, even as driving has declined, the government's road safety agency reported Thursday.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimated that 8,730 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes from January through March, compared with the 7,900 fatalities from the same period in 2020.

The increase in traffic fatalities is a continuation of a trend that started in 2020. In June, the NHTSA reported that traffic deaths rose 7% last year to 38,680, the most since 2007. That increase came even as the number of miles traveled by vehicle fell 13% from 2019 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The NHTSA said drivers continue to exhibit risky behavior on the roads, including speeding, not wearing [seat belts](#), and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Preliminary data from the Federal Highway Administration shows that vehicle miles traveled fell 2.1%—roughly 14.9 billion miles—in the first three months of 2021. The agency estimates that there were 1.26 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled in the [first quarter](#) this year, compared to a rate of 1.12 deaths for the same period in 2020.

Neither the data from 2020 nor 2021 is final.

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