

SAFETY & RECALLS

Study: Injuries triple for pedestrians wearing headphones

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Serious injuries sustained by pedestrians while listening to headphones have more than tripled in six years, according to a new study published this week in the journal *Injury Prevention*.

According to the study, between January 2004 and June 2011, there were 116 reports of death or injury of pedestrians wearing headphones. Most of the incidents occurred in urban areas, and the average age of the victims was 21. More specifically, about two thirds were male (68 percent) and under 30 years old (67 percent).

Significantly, trains hit over half of the victims, and approximately one in four reports state that horns or sirens sounded before the pedestrian was struck.

Researchers from the University of Maryland in Baltimore searched the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Google News Archives and the Westlaw Campus Research Database. The authors report "The association between distraction caused by cell phone use while driving and driver/passenger fatalities has been documented, but the safety risks associated with headphone use by pedestrians remains unknown."

It should be noted that as the researchers point out, the study has its limitations. It relies, in part, on media, which may report more fatal than non-fatal incidents of this nature, and there is no way to collect information about 'near misses', in which pedestrians wearing headphones suddenly become aware of danger and avoid injury.

Also, the authors point out that along with the increase of injuries to pedestrians wearing headphones, ownership of devices with headphones has also increased. According to findings by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 74 percent of teenagers reported owning an MP3 player in 2008, and another Pew Study found cell phone use increased from 45 percent in 2004 to 71 percent in 2008 for teenagers (12 to 17 years old).

"Everybody is aware of the risk of cell phones and texting in automobiles, but I see more and more teens distracted with the latest devices and headphones in their ears," lead author Richard Lichtenstein, M.D., professor of pediatrics at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and director of pediatric emergency medicine research at the University of Maryland Medical Center, in Baltimore, said in a statement to the press.

In their conclusion, the study authors write that further research is needed to determine if and how headphone use compromises pedestrian safety.

[Headphone use and pedestrian injury and death in the United States: 2004-2011](#) [*Injury Prevention*] [Social Media and Young Adults](#) [*Pew Internet*] — *Maggie Shader*