Effect of Michigan’s Helmet Law Repeal

Michigan’s universal helmet law was partially repealed in April 2012. In a recently published study of motorcycle crash data, the University of Michigan Injury Center found that the partial repeal of the helmet law resulted in a 25% decline in statewide helmet use and a 14% increase in head injuries requiring trauma center treatment.\(^1\)

**Introduction**

SB 291 allowed riders 21 years and older to ride without wearing a helmet if they met the following requirements: 1) they carried first party medical insurance of $20,000 or more, and 2) passed a motorcycle safety course or held a motorcycle endorsement for at least two years.\(^2\)

**Impact of the repeal on helmet use**

- Overall helmet use among riders in the state declined from 99.4% to 75% following the repeal.\(^3,4\)
- Among hospitalized riders involved in a crash, helmet use also declined 27% following the repeal.\(^1\)
- Lowest rates of helmet use among crash-involved riders were observed among those who were intoxicated (44.7%).\(^3\)

**Impact of the repeal on head injuries and fatalities**

- While fatalities did not change overall, head injuries among hospitalized, crash-involved motorcyclists increased 14% following the repeal, affecting nearly 50% of all crash-involved riders seeking trauma care.\(^1\)
- Among those with head injuries, a greater percentage were attributable to skull fractures following the repeal, with fewer injuries occurring as a result of minor concussions.\(^1\)
- The need for invasive neurosurgical procedures (e.g., cranial surgery) nearly doubled following the repeal (3.7% to 6.5%).\(^1\)
- Overall, among motorcyclists involved in a crash, not wearing a helmet doubled the odds of a head injury and doubled the odds of a fatality.\(^1\)

**Financial implications of the repeal**

- According to national data, 1 out of 3 motorcycle riders involved in crashes have public insurance (e.g., Medicaid), are self-payers, or are uninsured.\(^5\)
- The average acute care cost for non-helmeted riders who are hospitalized after a crash is about $33,000, which is 35% higher than the cost for helmeted riders.\(^6\)
- While motorcyclists represent 2% of all assessments paid into the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association, they account for a disproportionate share of money paid out of the MCCA –8% of all claims reported.\(^7\)
References


