

On the Road: seniors more prone to traffic fatalities in Florida, new study says

By [Dan Scanlan](#)

| RANK | STATE | NUMBER OF FATALITIES INVOLVING AT LEAST ONE 65+ DRIVER | STATE | PERCENTAGE OF FATALITIES INVOLVING AT LEAST ONE 65+ DRIVER | STATE | NUMBER OF LICENSED DRIVERS 65+ | STATE | PERCENTAGE OF LICENSED DRIVERS 65+ |
|------|----------------|--|---------------|--|----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Florida | 682 | Wisconsin | 26% | California | 3,999,876 | West Virginia | 25% |
| 2 | Texas | 568 | Minnesota | 25% | Florida | 3,341,250 | Arkansas | 23% |
| 3 | California | 554 | Kansas | 25% | Texas | 2,544,333 | Florida | 23% |
| 4 | Georgia | 299 | Nebraska | 24% | New York | 2,442,349 | Maine | 23% |
| 5 | North Carolina | 285 | Rhode Island | 24% | Pennsylvania | 1,911,928 | Vermont | 22% |
| 6 | Pennsylvania | 267 | Maine | 23% | Ohio | 1,616,214 | Oregon | 22% |
| 7 | Ohio | 250 | Oregon | 23% | Illinois | 1,507,439 | Delaware | 21% |
| 8 | Tennessee | 233 | Pennsylvania | 22% | Michigan | 1,432,987 | Pennsylvania | 21% |
| 9 | Illinois | 232 | Tennessee | 22% | North Carolina | 1,376,260 | Alabama | 21% |
| 10 | Michigan | 231 | West Virginia | 22% | Georgia | 1,186,660 | South Dakota | 21% |
| 11 | New York | 222 | Ohio | 22% | New Jersey | 1,153,534 | Montana | 21% |
| 12 | Missouri | 206 | New Jersey | 22% | Virginia | 1,087,440 | Minnesota | 21% |
| 13 | Arizona | 179 | Missouri | 22% | Tennessee | 1,035,885 | South Carolina | 20% |
| 14 | Kentucky | 178 | Michigan | 22% | Washington | 970,075 | New York | 20% |
| 15 | Alabama | 161 | New York | 22% | Massachusetts | 921,308 | Ohio | 20% |
| 16 | Indiana | 161 | Iowa | 22% | Arizona | 899,807 | Michigan | 20% |
| 17 | South Carolina | 160 | Florida | 21% | Indiana | 848,297 | Oklahoma | 20% |
| 18 | Wisconsin | 159 | Illinois | 21% | Alabama | 837,360 | Rhode Island | 20% |
| 19 | Virginia | 151 | Kentucky | 21% | Missouri | 830,871 | Hawaii | 20% |
| 20 | Mississippi | 141 | Arkansas | 21% | Wisconsin | 817,848 | Mississippi | 20% |

Spring Break is coming to Florida next week, and with it a major increase of traffic on the state's roads as millions vacation from here and many other states.

Among those drivers will be the young, traditionally the leading victims of traffic crashes, according to experts. But another bracket is now taking the lead in fatal crashes in Florida, at the other end of the age spectrum.

Florida now leads the country in the number (682) of traffic fatalities involving at least one driver over 65, according to TRIP, a national nonprofit transportation research group in Washington. Florida is also second in the nation in the number (3,341,250) of drivers 65 or older. In both cases, Texas ranked behind Florida with 568 deaths and 2,544,250 drivers.

Crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2015, 2,333 teens 16 to 19 years old in the United States were killed, or about six every day, the CDC said. But the older you get, the worse the crash fatality statistics get, according to experts.

According to the TRIP "Preserving the Mobility and Safety of Older Americans" report, an estimated 46 million Americans are 65 or older, accounting for 15 percent of the total population. But the percentage is higher in Florida, with TRIP's report saying 23 percent of the 3.3 million licensed drivers in Florida are 65 or older, based on 2012 to 2016 statistics.

TRIP's report did not surprise Sgt. Dylan Bryan, the Florida Highway Patrol spokesman for Northeast Florida. Florida is a destination for older residents and drivers. And they use the same smartphones that lead to distracted younger drivers, and one cause of accidents, he said.

"Florida being a popular destination for the older crowd who retire or relocate, that brings more people down here. We are also looking at driver distractions with technology," Bryan said. "... Put those into the older crowd where driving and dealing with something on a smaller screen could be more difficult. Driver distraction and cellphone use is definitely a main culprit to our crashes and that is 100 percent preventable."

Of those 65 or older, the age that saw the highest number of Florida fatalities in crashes were those 90 or older, with 27 victims, followed by 25 for those age 65, state statistics show. Alcohol was the cause of 17 of those age 65 or older, while drugs were the reason for 28 more deaths, statistics show.

Bryan said troopers in Northeast Florida aren't seeing any apparent local increase in older driver fatalities, since the higher populations of 65-plus drivers are still focused in the state's more retirement-oriented communities. But to make driving safer for older Floridians, TRIP's report recommends clearer, brighter and

simpler signage with large lettering, brighter street markings, widening or adding left-turn lanes and driver training. Bryan said the Highway Patrol is working with the Florida Department of Transportation on similar ways to make driving safer for older motorists with issues like restricted mobility and failing eyesight.

Other traffic notes:

- Contractors have temporarily striped and opened the second northbound lane at the Acosta Bridge exit at the Main Street bridge split for the Overland Bridge project. Some nighttime closures could still occur there as the work is finalized. The overall project is still slated for completion this spring.
- North Main Street between Seventh and Eighth streets will be shut down from 3 to 9 p.m. Saturday, as Hyperion Brewing Co. at 1740 N. Main St. hosts a St. Patrick's Day Block Party. The event co-host is Crispy's Springfield Gallery.

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