

Arkansas traffic fatalities rose 37% from 2019 to 2021

by: [C.C. McCandless](#) | June 29, 2022

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. (KNWA/KFTA) — A study from tripnet.org, a national transportation research nonprofit, reports that traffic fatalities in Arkansas rose 37 percent from 2019 to 2021.

According to a press release, the number of traffic fatalities in the U.S. surged by 19 percent from 2019 to 2021. Traffic fatalities began to increase dramatically in 2020 even as vehicle travel rates plummeted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Traffic fatalities continued to increase in 2021 as vehicle travel returned to near pre-pandemic levels. The report documents the increase in traffic fatalities and fatality rates from 2019 to 2021 at the national and state levels, examines possible causes for this increase, and prescribes a broad, comprehensive approach to reducing traffic fatalities in the U.S.

By April 2020, as most activity was curtailed in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, U.S. vehicle travel was 40 percent lower than in April 2019. But by October 2020, U.S. vehicle travel rebounded to within nine percent of October 2019 levels.

Overall U.S. vehicle travel in 2020 was 11 percent lower than in 2019, dropping from 3.3 trillion vehicle miles of travel (VMT) to 2.9 trillion. However, despite the significant decrease in vehicle travel from 2019 to 2020, the overall number of traffic fatalities during the same time increased by eight percent (from 36,096 to 38,824) and the traffic fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles of travel increased by 21 percent (from 1.11 to 1.34).

ARKANSAS TRAFFIC FATALITY AND VEHICLE MILES OF TRAVEL (VMT) DATA				
	2019	2020	2021	2019-2021 Change
Traffic Fatalities	505	638	690	+37%
Fatalities per 100 Million VMT	1.36	1.88	1.86	+36%
VMT (Billions)	37.1	33.9	37.2	0%

In 2021, as COVID-related restrictions gradually lifted, U.S. vehicle travel increased to approximately 3.2 trillion miles, a 10 percent increase over 2020 levels, but still three percent below 2019's pre-pandemic levels. From 2020 to 2021 the number of traffic fatalities increased by approximately 11 percent (from 38,824 to 42,915), roughly on pace with the 10 percent increase in vehicle travel during the same time, and the highest number recorded since 2005. The traffic fatality rate in 2021 rose to 1.35 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel.

Bicycle and pedestrian fatalities also increased significantly over pre-pandemic levels. From 2019 to 2021, the number of U.S. pedestrians killed increased by 18 percent (from 6,205 to 7,342) and the number of bicyclists killed increased by 16 percent (from 846 to 985). Pedestrian and bicycle deaths accounted for 19 percent of all U.S. traffic fatalities in 2021.

The significant increase in traffic fatalities since the onset of the pandemic appears largely related to increased risks being taken by drivers. In an October 2021 report, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that “after the declaration of the public health emergency in March 2020, driving patterns and behaviors in the United States changed significantly. Of the drivers who remained on the roads, some engaged in riskier behavior, including speeding, failure to wear seat belts, and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.”

The entire report [is available here](#).