

Post-pandemic driving patterns may be behind surge in traffic deaths in California: Study

Deadly traffic accidents caused \$166 billion in economic and quality of life costs like medical care, legal fees, insurance and property damage in 2022 alone

By [Shandel Menezes](#) • Wednesday, June 21, 2023



NBC7's Shandel Menezes spoke to TRIP, a national transportation research nonprofit, about the rise in traffic fatalities in the state.

Traffic deaths in California have increased 22% since 2019, [according to a study](#) by transportation nonprofit [TRIP](#), and San Diego families haven't been spared.

"Californians have a 28% greater likelihood of being killed in a traffic crash than they were just three years ago," said Rocky Moretti, TRIP Director of Policy and Research.

Over the past two months, NBC 7 connected with several families mourning these outcomes.

Daniel Jimenez lost his pregnant wife in a hit-and-run in Bay Terraces last month.

"She was kind of like our whole rock, you know?" Jimenez said. "Particularly me, being gone all the time, she was mom and dad for our kids."

Kelsi Taylor lost her sister, Courteney, to a drunk driver in April.

"I just started screaming and I felt like I was going to collapse on the fence," she remembered.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found after the pandemic started, driving patterns in the US changed significantly. Of the drivers who stayed on the roads, some of them took more risks like driving under the influence, speeding and not wearing their seat belts.

Reina Jackson's son, Ajani, died in a street racing accident in 2021. He wasn't wearing a seatbelt.

"I would've smashed out every window of that car," she said. "I would've put sugar in the tank. I would have sliced the tires and it would have been OK. He'd be mad at me for a year, two years, whatever. He would still be here."

There's a hefty price tag for these accidents as well, coming in at \$166 billion in economic and quality of life costs like medical care, legal fees, insurance and property damage in 2022 alone.

"The approach really requires improved behavior by motorists, and that will also involve enforcement to make sure that rules, including speeding and impaired driving, are followed," said Moretti.

[TRIP](#) says safer roads, safer vehicles and more efficient post-accident care can cut down on traffic deaths.