

[GRAND RAPIDS](#)

Report: Traffic-related deaths increased during pandemic

by: [Taylor Morris](#) | Wednesday, June 21, 2023



GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (WOOD) — A new report by [TRIP](#), a national transportation research nonprofit, shows traffic-related deaths in Michigan spiked 15% between 2019 and 2022, even when COVID-related closures forced many to work from home.

“[The report](#) shows that speeds on Michigan roads have increased significantly since the pandemic, and drivers are just taking riskier

behavior,” said Lance Binoniemi, vice president of government affairs of the Michigan Infrastructure & Transportation Association.

[Read TRIP’s full report](#)

Michigan State Police Lt. Derrick Carroll said even though there were less drivers on the road during the pandemic, troopers saw an increase in speedy drivers.

“People thought there would be less traffic, more time for them to break the law, if you will,” he said.

“Thinking law enforcement was not out there, and actually we were out enforcing the speed limits and other things and traffic control.”

According to the report, in 2019, there were 985 traffic-related deaths. More recently in 2022, there were 1,133.

“We have significant safety risk on our roads,” said Binoniemi. “And it’s not just due to the driving behavior. Our roads are in poor condition, as well all know, and we need to invest more.”

News 8 asked Binoniemi if infrastructure could have been the main reason for these crashes.

“I am not sure on what percentage are caused by road conditions, or by behavior of the drivers, but certainly there are fatalities that occur because of poor road conditions,” he said. “That is a fact.”

Lt. Carroll said many times, it’s young drivers that are involved in these crashes. He hopes when [Michigan’s new hands-free driving law](#) goes into effect, making it illegal for drivers to hold or use a cell phone while driving, it will help cut down on deaths on Michigan roadways.

“Speed is often a factor,” said Lt. Carroll. “A lot of times, also unfortunately, for younger teenagers between ... the driving age to the mid 20’s, traffic fatalities are the number one cause of death. So, a lot of these are younger people, they’re inexperienced, you throw into the mix cell phones, where they’re distracted, and it’s just a recipe for disaster.”