

Almost all kids with road injuries were not buckled up, local trauma data finds

More than half of adults were also not wearing seat belts during an accident

Claudia Tan

Doctors have found that almost all children who suffered injuries in road accidents were not restrained by seat belts or child seats while travelling in a vehicle.

Figures from the National Trauma Registry, set up in 2011 to collate trauma data from the 10 general public hospitals, showed that 95 per cent of children aged 10 to 16, and more than half of adults, were not using a seat belt when an accident happened.

Adjunct Assistant Professor Raj Menon, who heads the National University Centre for Trauma at the National University Hospital (NUH), said: "There is a clear correlation that not using seat belts does result in worse injuries.

"We tend to focus on drivers and those in the front seat, but rear pas-

sengers are also very much at risk when they do not wear a seat belt," added Prof Menon, who was speaking on April 2 at the National Injury Prevention Conference held at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH).

The registry data also showed that 80 per cent of children here aged nine and below were not using car seats when an accident happened.

This is despite research showing that using proper restraints can reduce injury risk by more than 80 per cent.

An approved child restraint is compulsory in Singapore for all children below the height of 1.35m travelling in a motor vehicle.

Prof Menon, who was speaking at the conference attended by participants from government agencies, healthcare institutions and community organisations to develop in-

jury prevention strategies, said that during a high velocity accident, an enormous amount of energy is transferred to "relatively delicate bodies".

He added: "Having a seat belt reduces that movement, secures you to the car frame and prevents you from being flung (around), and that really makes all the difference.

"It decreases the rate of head injuries and injuries to the trunk of the body, where you can have significant bleeding when you're unsecured."

A KKH survey of 200 families found that those who did not use a child seat cited issues with managing their child's behaviour in the seats and logistical constraints, including the need to take the seats with them.

Clinical Assistant Professor Ronald Tan, who chairs the Injury Prevention Working Group at KKH, highlighted two separate traffic accidents involving children with vastly different outcomes.

One of them was a child whose parent took him out of the car seat



Adjunct Assistant Professor Raj Menon (front), Clinical Assistant Professor Ronald Tan (back left), and Dr Ivy Ang, consultant, children's emergency, at Khoo Teck Puat-National University Children's Medical Institute, wearing their seat belts at an event at KK Women's and Children's Hospital on April 2. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

95%

Proportion of children aged 10 to 16 who were not using a seat belt when an accident happened.

9.9%

Proportion of child cyclists who were wearing a helmet when an accident occurred.

because he was crying, mere minutes before an accident occurred. The child suffered a head injury and required neurosurgery.

The second child, a newborn baby, was placed in a child car seat and was completely unharmed by the

collision.

"These two cases illustrate how just one simple act can prevent (children) from becoming patients," said Prof Tan, who added that children may suffer brain injuries in an accident, which could result in epilepsy or lifelong disability.

The Straits Times previously reported that a baby girl, who was carried in her mother's hands in a car, died of her injuries after an accident in 2021. The mother, who was cradling the baby, had lost hold of the child when the car and a motorcycle collided.

Data from the National Trauma Registry also highlighted other areas of concern, including the risk of severe injury and death among cyclists.

The figures showed that only 9.9 per cent of child cyclists and 28.1 per cent of adult cyclists were wearing a helmet when an accident occurred.

Injuries sustained by motorcyclists and the elderly were also over-represented in the registry's data.

Between 2015 and 2024, motorcyclists and pillion riders accounted for 52.6 per cent of all moderate to severe road traffic injuries among adults.

Pedestrians aged 65 and above accounted for 75 per cent of fatal pedestrian accidents in 2025, despite only making up 12.9 per cent of Singapore's population.

The number of elderly persons involved in fatal accidents involving jaywalking has nearly doubled, from seven in 2024 to 15 in 2025.

Said Prof Menon: "Elderly jaywalkers are particularly vulnerable because they're not protected.

"There's no safety mechanism apart from their own bodies to prevent them from getting injured."

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