

Brake and AXA UK driver survey reports

Seat belts and passive safety systems



In February 2024, Brake and AXA UK asked 2,016* car drivers about their views on seat belts and other passive safety systems to prevent injury in a road crash. The survey was carried out by independent market research company SurveyGoo.

*Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

At AXA, prioritising road safety is at the heart of our commitment to safeguarding lives and promoting a culture of responsible driving. Our collaboration with Brake, the road safety charity, underpins our dedication to gain deeper insights into public attitudes towards driving and road safety.



In the UK, road crashes claim the lives of five people every day. At AXA, we are committed to being more than just an insurance provider and seek to actively support our customers by promoting road safety behaviours to improve driving practices and ultimately prevent fatalities. We believe that highlighting the vital importance of wearing seat belts is one of the most effective ways to keep people safe. Since seat belts became mandatory in all new vehicles in 1983, research has shown that they can cut the risk of serious injuries by around 50%.

Our study delves into public perceptions of crucial safety features such as seat belts, airbags and headrests. A key part of our survey focuses on understanding how people's attitudes toward seat belt use may vary based on their roles as drivers, passengers, or when travelling in taxis. Our findings reveal a clear acknowledgment of the safety benefits associated with wearing seat belts, with an overwhelming 97% of respondents agreeing with the enforcement of seat belt usage for all drivers and passengers.

However, when in a taxi only 79% of individuals reported consistent seat belt use, falling to just 55% when travelling as passengers in minibuses or coaches. Alarming, over the last five years, 24% of individuals killed in road crashes were not wearing seat belts. In light of this, AXA and Brake are calling for mandatory seat belt reminders in all vehicles, a review in seat belt legislation for taxis, minibuses,

coaches and alike, plus a comprehensive industry and government-backed awareness campaign focused on promoting the safety advantages of seat belt use to all road users.

Shockingly the research reveals that 15% of drivers don't always check that child passengers are in correctly sized and fitted child seats or wearing a seat belt. At AXA, we recognise the critical importance of child safety in vehicles. Ensuring that children are appropriately secured in child seats and wearing seat belts is paramount to preventing avoidable harm. As part of our commitment to road safety, we believe that raising awareness on the proper use of child seats and seat belts for young passengers is essential for safeguarding their well being on our roads.

This joint effort aims to instil a cultural shift, emphasising the critical importance of seat belt wearing to protect lives and prevent avoidable tragedies on our roads. By championing these initiatives, we hope to prioritise safety-oriented driving and ultimately reduce road crashes.

Alain Zweibrucker
AXA Retail CEO, AXA UK



Seat belts are one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect ourselves when travelling by car, yet many drivers and passengers are compromising their own safety – and the safety of those travelling with them – by choosing not to belt up on every journey.



The benefits of wearing a seat belt are widely recognised, and they can reduce the risk of death in a serious crash by up to 50%.¹ The way they work is simple: seat belts prevent drivers and passengers from hitting the inside of the vehicle or being thrown out of a vehicle in the event of a crash. They also prevent rear passengers from being thrown forward from the force of impact, thereby protecting themselves and the person sitting in front of them.

The drivers we surveyed in this report clearly understand the importance of wearing a seat belt, with 97% agreeing that it should be enforced for all drivers and passengers, and 96% saying they always wear a seat belt when driving. However, our survey also revealed that even though people strongly support the wearing of seat belts, in some situations they occasionally choose not to wear one.

For example, around a fifth (21%) of those surveyed said they don't always wear a seat belt when a passenger in a taxi, even though it is a legal requirement to wear one if available, and 6% don't always belt up when driving short journeys under 15 minutes.

Our research also found that although drivers appear to have a good understanding of the safety benefits of seat belts and child seats for babies and children, a shocking 15% of drivers don't always check that child passengers are in a correctly sized and fitted child seat or wearing a seat belt. There also appears to be a degree of apathy regarding some of the other passive safety features in cars – features such as head restraints, which help protect against whiplash and other injuries. Only 55% of those surveyed said they always check their head restraint is set at the correct height, and only 39% always check passenger head restraints.

The law requiring drivers and all adult passengers to wear a seat belt came into force in 1991, and since 2006 all children under 12 (or below 135cm in height) have been required to use a suitable child seat.² Seat belts have been required for all seats on coaches since 2001, except for vehicles designed for urban use with standing passengers.³

Government statistics show good levels of compliance, with 95% of drivers observed wearing a seat belt in 2021. They also reveal a significant rise in seat belt use for rear seat passengers over the last 25 years, from 54% in 1999 to 84% in 2021.⁴

1. Elvik, R., Høy, A., Vaa, T., Sørensen, M. (eds.) (2002) The Handbook of Road Safety Measures. 2nd edn. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley
2. <https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law>
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seat-belts-in-minibuses-coaches-and-other-buses/seat-belts-in-minibuses-coaches-and-other-buses>
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seatbelt-and-mobile-phone-use-surveys-2021/seatbelt-wearing-rates-great-britain-2021>

It remains the case, however, that almost a quarter (24%) of people who die on roads in Britain aren't wearing a seat belt, with men and young people consistently over-represented.⁵ On average, over the last five years:

- 30% of men who died on roads weren't wearing a seat belt, compared with 14% of women.
- 34% of young people aged 17–29 who died on roads weren't wearing a seat belt, compared with just 11% aged 60 or over.
- Overall, 24% of drivers and 26% of passengers who died on roads weren't wearing a seat belt.

A report published by the Parliamentary Advisory Committee for Transport Safety (PACTS) in 2019 found that those killed or seriously injured when not wearing a seat belt were also more likely to be from areas of social deprivation, travelling at night, travelling in older vehicles, impaired by alcohol or drugs, speeding or driving aggressively.⁶

More than half a million drivers were penalised for seat belt offences in the decade from 2012 and 2022; however, the number of offences resulting in a fixed penalty notice, driver retraining, or some form of court action, went down from 133,000 in 2012 to 48,000 in 2022.⁷ More than 1.9m people attended and completed road awareness courses in 2022, as part of the National Driver Offending Retraining Scheme, which offers online courses as an alternative to paying a fine for different driving offences, including speeding or not wearing a seat belt. Fewer than 1% (16,961) attended the 'Your Belt Your Life' seat belt awareness course, whereas 82% (1,576,401) attended the much better known National Speed Awareness Course.⁸

Government data for injuries relating to seat belt use is incomplete; however, five-year average data published in 2021 showed that non-use rates were much higher for those killed (24%) than seriously injured (10%) or slightly injured (3%).⁹ Applying the same percentages to the most recent casualty statistics,¹⁰ we could reasonably estimate that almost 3,000 of the 28,941 people seriously injured on roads in Britain in 2022 may not have been wearing a seat belt, and just over 3,000 of the 112,619 who were slightly injured may not have been wearing a seat belt. That's approximately 6,000 people in one year who may have been able to protect themselves against traumatic brain injuries, neck and spinal injury, and damage to internal organs.

As well as reducing the harm and injury to each individual, protecting people from sustaining traumatic injuries like these would have a wider benefit to the health service. Preventing people from suffering serious or slight injuries, means they would not require as much support from the NHS. Given that the health service is facing record high waiting lists^{10a} and staff shortage,^{10b} any reduction in demand for these services would have a wider benefit to society.

This report by Brake and AXA UK explores the risks some people may be taking when they choose not to wear a seat belt, compromising their own safety and that of their passengers. We know that every percentage increase in the number of people wearing seat belts helps reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads. It's simple: seat belts save lives.



Ross Moorlock
Chief executive, Brake

5. Department for Transport (2023). RAS0711: Proportion of car occupant fatalities not wearing a seat belt: Great Britain, from 2013
6. Webster, E., and Norbury, F. (2019). Seat Belts: The Forgotten Road Safety Priority. PACTS
7. Home Office (2024). Fixed penalty notices (FPNs) and other outcomes for motoring offences statistics: Police powers and procedures, 2022/23
8. <https://www.ukroed.org.uk/scheme/trends-statistics/>
9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seat-belt-and-mobile-phone-use-surveys-2021/seat-belt-wearing-rates-great-britain-2021>
10. Department for Transport (2023) Reported road casualties Great Britain. Annual report 2022 and associated data sets
10a. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-66188529>
10b. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-62267282>

In this survey, we explored the attitudes of drivers to seat belts. We sought to determine if they belt up on every journey, and if they understand how seat belts help protect against death and injury in a road crash. We also asked their views about head restraints, air bags and child seats.



Section 1 - Understanding safety features in cars

In this section, we asked drivers which safety features their car has, and whether they understand what they do.

In question 1, we asked drivers about the safety features in their car.

Most common safety features

Air bags for driver and front passenger seats **94%**

Adjustable head restraints for driver and front passenger seats **92%**

Three-point seat belts – for driver and all passenger seats **91%**

Seat belt reminders for front seats **90%**

Adjustable head restraints for rear passenger seats **77%**

Seat belt pre-tensioners **67%**

Seat belt reminders for rear seats **66%**

ISOFIX points for child seats **50%**

Air bags for rear passenger seats **39%**

Load limiters **36%**

Since 1991, it has been a legal requirement for drivers and all passengers to wear a seat belt when travelling by car. Most manufacturers fit three-point seat belts as standard in all seating positions, so it's not surprising that 91% of drivers said they have these in their car. Just 4% don't have three-point seat belts for driver and all passenger seats, and 5% said they don't know.

The other most common safety features are airbags, head restraints and seat belt reminders for driver and front passenger seats, and more than 90% of drivers said they have these features.

However, it's cause for concern that those travelling in the rear seats of a vehicle appear to be protected to a lesser extent. For example, while 90% of drivers told us they have seat belt reminders for driver and front seat passengers, only 66% have reminders for rear seat passengers.

For more data tables to support the information given in this report, go to www.brake.org.uk/seat-belt-survey.

Section 1 - Understanding safety features in cars

Similarly, although 94% of drivers said they have air bags for driver and front seat passengers, only 39% have them for rear seat passengers. Likewise, 92% have adjustable head restraints for driver and front seat passengers, compared with only 77% for rear passenger seats.

Overall, drivers show a good level of knowledge of the safety features in their car, but nearly half of all respondents (49%) told us they don't know if they have load limiters, which reduce the restraining force of a seat belt during a crash, to prevent injury from the seat belt. More than a quarter (28%) don't know whether their car has ISOFIX points to automatically lock a child seat into metal clips, and 22% don't know if they have seat belt pre-tensioners, which tighten the seat belt and take in the slack during the first milliseconds of a crash.

We also found:

- Only 80% of 17-24-year-olds said they have three-point belts for driver and all passenger seats, compared with 94% of drivers aged 75 and older.
- 63% of London drivers said they have air bags for rear passenger seats, compared with 39% nationally.

Which safety features are currently mandatory in the UK?

Mandatory

- ✓ Air bags for driver and front passenger seats – All new cars since 1998, and side-on airbags since 2003.
- ✓ Three-point seat belts for driver and all passenger seats – Front outboard positions on all new cars since 1968, and all existing cars back to 1965.
- ✓ Seat belt reminders for front seats – Since 2014 for driver seats in new cars, and since 2019 for all seats in cars/vans and front seats in buses and trucks.
- ✓ Seat belt reminders for rear seats – Since 2019 for all seats in cars and vans.
- ✓ ISOFIX points for child seats – Since 2014 for all new vehicles.

Not mandatory

- ✗ Adjustable head restraints for driver and front passenger seats.
- ✗ Adjustable head restraints for rear passenger seats.
- ✗ Seat belt pre-tensioners.
- ✗ Air bags for rear passenger seats.
- ✗ Load limiters.

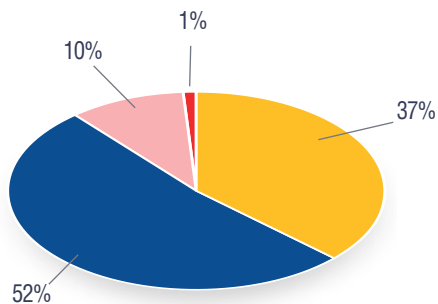


Section 1 - Understanding safety features in cars

In question 2, we asked drivers if they understood what all the safety features listed in question 1 do.

A clear majority (89%) of respondents said they know what most or all of the safety features do, with little variation across age and region. However, only 32% of female drivers said they understand all the features, compared with 41% of male drivers.

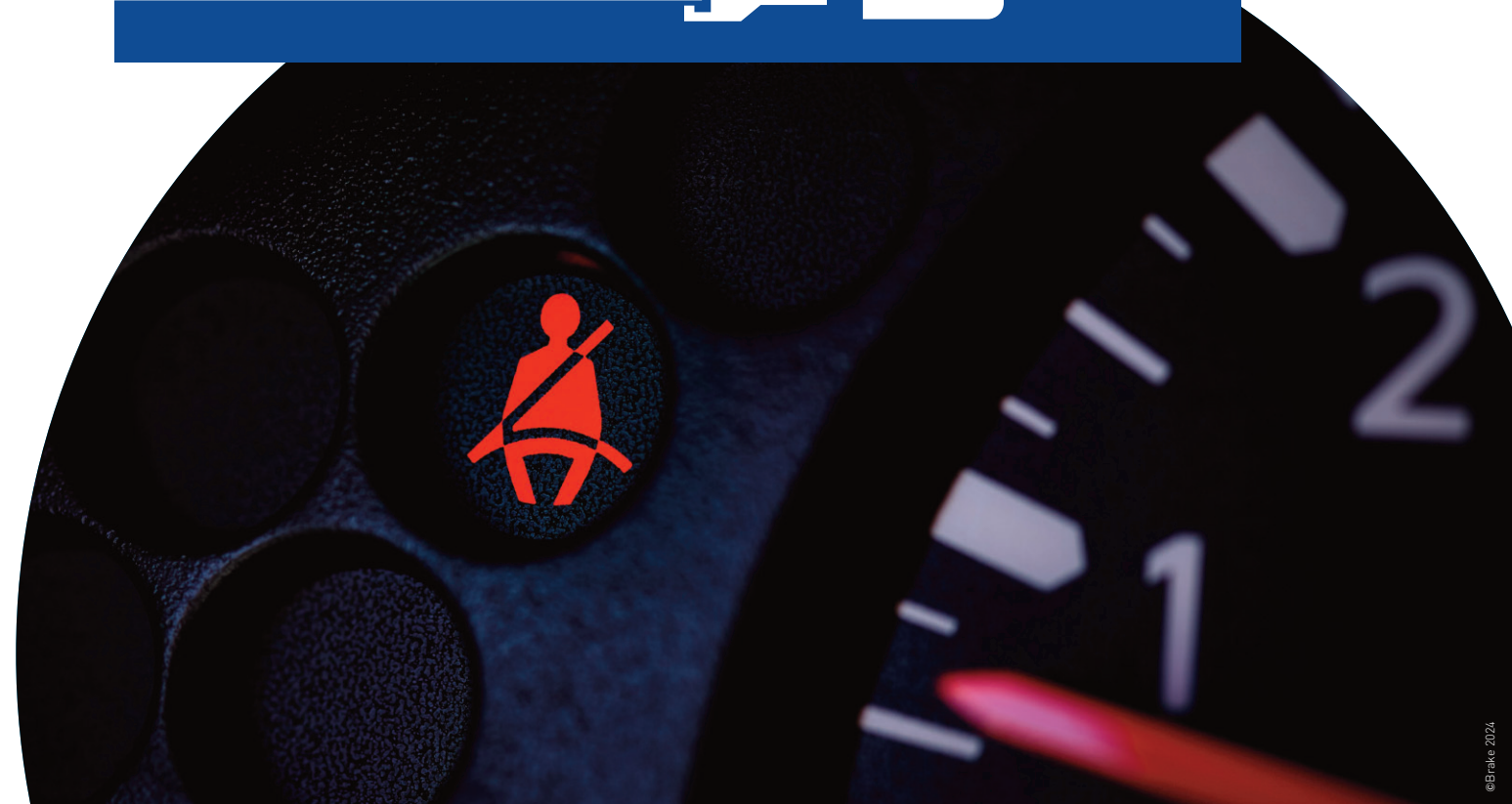
Q2. Do you understand what all the safety features listed in question 1 do?



- Yes, all of them
- Yes, most of them
- Yes, a few of them
- No, none of them

89%

of drivers understand the benefits of all or most safety features



Section 2 - Do we always wear a seat belt?

In this section we asked drivers about their general attitudes to seat belts and their habits when driving and travelling as a passenger.

In question 3, we asked drivers to say which of a pair of statements they most agreed with.

97% agreed that wearing a seat belt (or using a child seat) is the law for all drivers and passengers and should be enforced.

3% agreed that drivers and passengers over the age of 14 should be able to choose whether to wear a seat belt.

It's encouraging to see overwhelming support for seat belt use for drivers and passengers, and responses were fairly consistent, regardless of gender, region or driving frequency.

There was a small but significant variation for younger drivers: 6% of drivers aged 17–24 said they thought drivers and passengers should be able to choose whether to wear a seat belt, compared with just 1% of drivers aged 65 and older.

RAC research in 2023 found that 68% of those polled said responsibility for all passengers to belt up should lie with the driver, and 69% favoured drivers who break the law paying both a fine and receiving at least three points on their licence.¹¹



11. <https://www.rac.co.uk/drive/news/motoring-news/motorists-responsibility-for-passengers-to-belt-up-should-lie-with-dri/>

Section 2 - Do we always wear a seat belt?

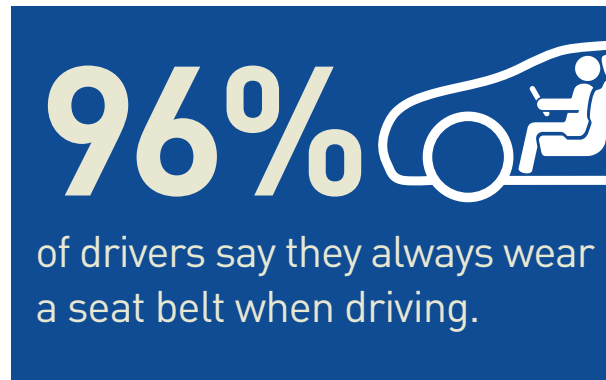
In question 4, we asked drivers to tell us when they wear a seat belt and why they might sometimes choose not to wear one.

A clear majority (96%) said they always wear a seat belt while driving, with no significant variation for age and gender.

Seat belt usage was lower for when travelling as a passenger. Only 90% of drivers said they always wear a seat belt when a passenger, which means that one in 10 don't always belt up on every journey.

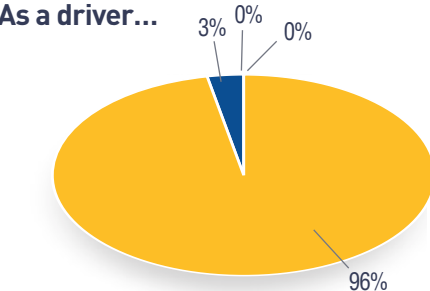
Drivers in London bucked the trend: only 85% said they always wear a seat belt when driving, compared with more than 93% of drivers in all other regions of the UK. Only 69% always wear a seat belt when a passenger, compared with more than 87% in all other regions.

When we looked at the results according to how frequently people drive, we found that 98% of respondents who drive daily said they would always wear a seat belt when driving, and 91% when a passenger.



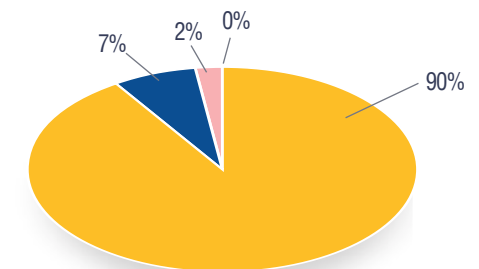
Q4a. Which of the following statements best apply to you?

As a driver...



- I always wear a seat belt
- I usually wear a seat belt
- I sometimes wear a seat belt
- I never wear a seat belt

As a passenger...



- I always wear a seat belt
- I usually wear a seat belt
- I sometimes wear a seat belt
- I never wear a seat belt

Section 2 - Do we always wear a seat belt?

Young and male drivers are at greater risk on roads

It's worrying to see that young and male drivers are less likely to always wear a seat belt, both when driving and travelling as a passenger.

Young and newly qualified drivers are high-risk road users and often over-represented in collision data. In Britain, drivers aged 17–24 make up only 6% of total licence holders yet represent 18% of all car drivers killed and seriously injured.^{12,13} In 2022, 30% of young people aged 17–29 who died on roads weren't wearing a seat belt.¹⁴

Men are also over-represented in collision data. In 2022, 76% of all road deaths in Britain (and 62% of all road casualties) were male.¹⁵

We found:

- 94% of men always wear a seat belt when driving, compared with 98% of women.
- 88% of men always wear a seat belt when a passenger, compared with 92% of women.
- 3% of 17–24-year-olds never wear a seat belt when a passenger.
- 93% of 25–34-year-olds and 90% of 35–44-year-olds always wear a seat belt when driving, compared with more than 95% in all other age groups.
- 84% of 17–24-year-olds and 81% of 25–44-year-olds always wear a seat belt when a passenger, compared with more than 94% in all other age groups.

Government CLICK! campaign urges young male drivers to wear a seat belt

In March 2024, the Department for Transport launched a new campaign called CLICK!, urging young male drivers to wear seat belts.¹⁶ Alongside targeted advertising on roadside posters, radio and social media, the campaign collaborated with county football associations and local clubs to promote 'belting up' when travelling to matchdays to keep themselves and their teammates safe.

The first seat belt-specific campaign since 2011, CLICK! aims to use relatable, personal moments between friends to drive home the consequences of not wearing a seat belt. It acts as a reminder that something as simple as clicking your seat belt could save your life and that of your friends.



12. DVLA (2023) GB Driving licence data. Table DRL0101. Provisional and Full driving licences held, by age and by gender, Great Britain

13. Department for Transport (2023) Reported road casualties Great Britain: Younger driver factsheet, 2022

14. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-people-urged-to-wear-seat-belts-in-new-life-saving-campaign22>.

15. Department for Transport (2023) Reported road casualties Great Britain: Younger driver factsheet, 2022

16. <https://www.think.gov.uk/campaign/seatbelts-2024/>

Section 2 - Do we always wear a seat belt?

We then asked drivers whether they would wear a seat belt in different situations, such as on a short journey, or when travelling in a taxi.

A clear majority said they always wear a seat belt when travelling short journeys, both as driver (95%) and passenger (92%), and when driving with no passengers (94%).

These results broadly align to the findings of a National Attitudes Survey about road safety, published in 2021, in which 86% of respondents agreed that it is important to wear a seat belt for journeys under 15 minutes, either as a passenger or when driving.¹⁷

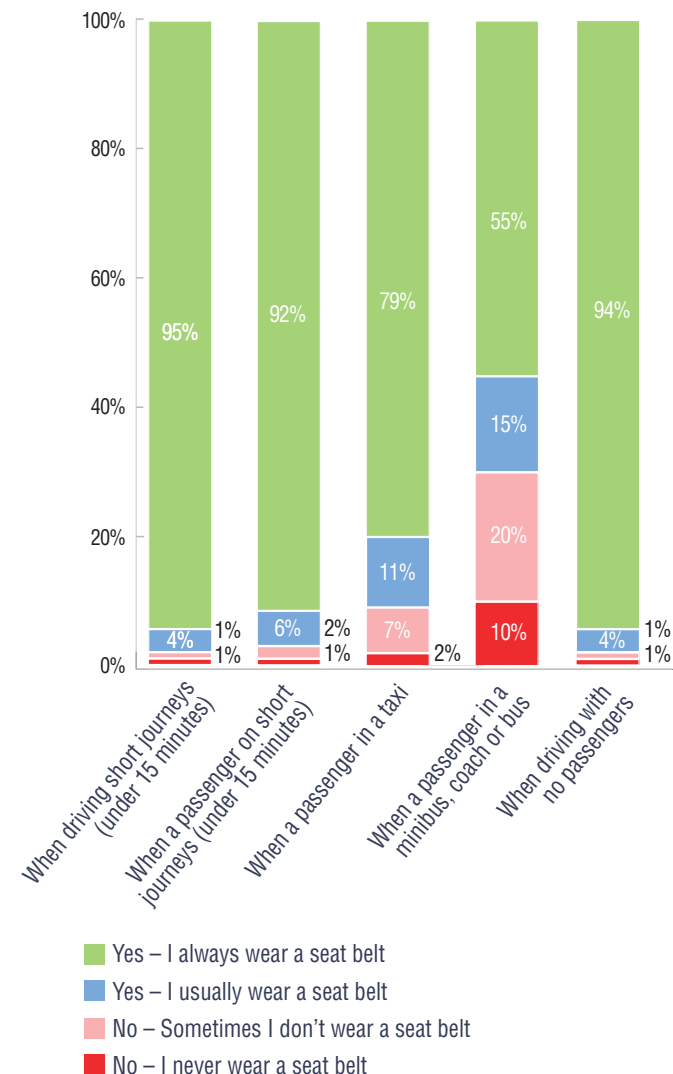
A smaller proportion (79%) said they always wear a seat belt when travelling in a taxi, and just 55% said they always wear one when a passenger in a minibus, bus, or coach.

We also found:

- Drivers in London are less likely to always wear a seat belt for short journeys, both when driving (86%) and as a passenger (79%).
- 82% of London drivers said they always wear a seat belt when driving with no passengers, compared with 94% overall.
- 82% of 17–24-year-olds and 81% of 25–34-year-olds always wear a seat belt when a passenger on short journeys.

In April 2024, Uber announced a new feature to remind passengers to fasten their seat belt, using audio alerts issued by the driver’s app and push notifications delivered to passenger phones.¹⁹

Q4b. Do you wear a seat belt in the following situations?



16. <https://www.think.gov.uk/campaign/seatbelts-2024/>

17. National Attitudes Survey regarding public attitudes towards road safety (2021). Road safety (NTAS05). Available at www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/national-travel-attitudes-study-ntas#road-safety-ntas05

18. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seat-belts-in-minibuses-coaches-and-other-buses/seat-belts-in-minibuses-coaches-and-other-buses>

19. <https://www.uber.com/gb/en/ride/safety/>

Section 2 - Do we always wear a seat belt?

Question 4c. Why might you choose not to wear a seat belt?

- Sometimes there isn't a seat belt or it is broken **12%**
- I forget to wear it **10%**
- I find it uncomfortable **8%**
- I find it restrictive **8%**
- I find it annoying **5%**
- I don't think I need to **3%**
- I don't think it will make me safer **2%**
- I don't understand what it does **2%**
- I don't know why **2%**
- I don't think the law applies to me **1%**
- My friends laugh at me **1%**
- None of the above, I always wear a seat belt **66%**

Next, we asked drivers about the reasons why they might choose not to wear a seat belt.

The most popular reason given for not wearing a seat belt was that sometimes there isn't one or it is broken (12%). 10% of drivers said they forget to wear a seat belt, and 8% said it is restrictive to wear one.

At first glance, the responses to this question - where only 66% of drivers said they always wear a seat belt - appear to contradict results from question 4a, in which 96% of drivers said they always wear a seat belt when driving, and 90% when a passenger.

However, in this question they are given more opportunity to consider every situation in which they might or might not wear a seat belt, even if only on a rare occasion, hence the disparity between the numbers.

These results are worrying, and reveal that even though the vast majority of people say they always wear a seat belt, in practice this might not be the case.

We also found:

- 12% of male drivers said they forget to wear a seat belt, compared with 8% of female drivers.
- 24% of drivers aged 17–24 and 18% aged 25–34 said they forget to wear a seat belt.
- 10% of male drivers said they find a seat belt restrictive, compared with 7% of female drivers.
- 10% of London drivers said they don't need to wear a seat belt



Section 2 - Do we always wear a seat belt?

Finally in this section, we asked drivers what would encourage them to wear a seat belt.

Question 4d. Which of the following reasons encourage you to wear a seat belt?

- Knowing that I'm protecting myself if there's a crash **80%**
- Knowing that I'm protecting other people in the car if there's a crash **73%**
- Avoiding fixed penalty points if I don't wear a seat belt when I'm supposed to **41%**
- Avoiding a penalty fine if I don't wear a seat belt when I'm supposed to **37%**
- Avoiding attending a seat belt awareness course **25%**
- None of the above **4%**



By far the most popular reasons for wearing a seat belt chosen by drivers were to protect themselves (80%) and other people in the vehicle (73%) if there is a crash. Seat belts are widely acknowledged as one of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce the risk of death and injury in a crash, and it's encouraging to see that drivers recognise this too.

There is a significant gender difference here: 85% of women said they wear a seat belt to protect themselves, compared with 75% of men; and 79% of women said they wear a seat belt to protect others in the vehicle, compared with 68% of men.

We also found, in line with responses to other questions, that younger drivers and London drivers may be less likely to value the safety benefits of wearing a seat belt.

- 70% of 25–34-year-olds said they wear a seat belt to protect themselves in a crash, compared with 93% of drivers aged 75 or older.
- Less than 63% of 17–24-year-olds said they wear a seat belt to protect others in a crash. Results were even lower for drivers aged 25–44 (61%).
- Only 50% of London drivers wear a seat belt to protect other people in a crash, compared with more than 68% in all other regions.
- 52% of drivers aged 17–24 would wear a seat belt to avoid fixed penalty points, compared with 41% overall.

Section 2 - Do we always wear a seat belt?

Operation Ping detects fleet drivers not wearing a seat belt

In 2023, National Highways launched a 12-week trial programme, working with fleet operators to address unsafe driving behaviours.

Using detection equipment mounted on vans and trailers along certain sections of motorway, they captured images of drivers using a mobile phone and drivers or passengers not wearing a seat belt. The images also captured the time and date, and vehicle registration details.

Data was then shared with the fleet operators so that they could identify and contact their drivers, and take action to prevent and deter unsafe driving behaviours.

Find out more at nationalhighways.co.uk



Section 3 - Seat belts and the law

In question 5, we explored driver knowledge about the law regarding seat belts.

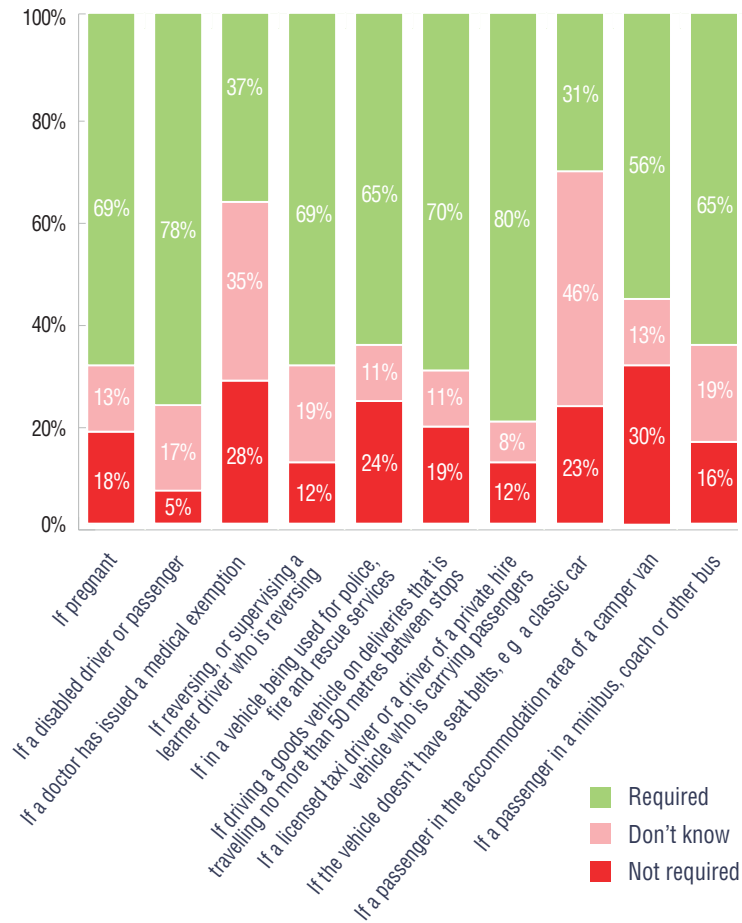
We wanted to find out how much they know about when it is legally required to wear a seat belt and when it is ok not to.

In general, we found that a high proportion of drivers think that a seat belt is required in most of the situations listed, even though it isn't. The proportion who didn't know was also quite high.

Failure to wear a seat belt could result in an on-the-spot fine of **£100**. You could be fined up to **£500** if prosecuted.



Q5. In which of these situations do you think is NOT REQUIRED or REQUIRED to wear a seat belt by law?



Seat belts and the law

UK law states that you must wear a seat belt if one is fitted in the seat you're using - there are only a few exceptions (see below). Failure to wear a seat belt could result in an on-the-spot fine of £100, or you could be fined up to £500 if prosecuted.

Drivers are responsible for ensuring that any children under 14 are in the correct child seat for their height or weight, or are wearing a seat belt if they're 12 or 13 years old (or if they are younger and over 135cm tall). You can be fined up to £500 if a child under 14 is not in the correct child seat or wearing a seat belt while you're driving.

As a passenger in taxis and private hire vehicles, you are required by law to wear seat belt where one is provided.

In minibuses, buses, and coaches, passengers aged 14 years and over must use a seat belt if one is available and they are personally responsible for doing so. Bus and coach operators must provide either signs or announcements to remind passengers that they must wear a seat belt, where one is available.²⁰

Exemptions

The UK Government website lists the following situations where a seat belt is not required.^{21, 22} You do not need to wear a seat belt if you are:

- a driver who is reversing, or supervising a learner driver who is reversing;
- in a vehicle being used for police, fire and rescue services;
- a passenger in a trade vehicle and you're investigating a fault;
- driving a goods vehicle on deliveries that is travelling no more than 50 metres between stops;
- a licensed taxi driver who is looking for customers either by being hailed in the street or by waiting at a taxi rank (known as 'plying for hire');
- a licensed taxi driver or a driver of a private hire vehicle who is carrying passengers.

The law also states that disabled and/or pregnant drivers and passengers must wear a seat belt, unless there is a medical exemption.²³

If a vehicle does not have seat belts, for example it's a classic car, you are not allowed to carry any children under three years old in it. Children over three are only allowed to sit in the back seats. These rules only apply if the vehicle was originally made without seat belts.²⁴

Although it is not illegal to travel in the accommodation area of a campervan, UK Government advises that passengers are safest in a forward or rear-facing seat equipped with a three-point seat belt. Although side-facing seats, with or without seat belts, are not illegal, they are not advised.

Children aged 12 or under should use a suitable child restraint, fitted in a forward or rear-facing seat with full three-point seat belts.²⁵

20. <https://www.think.gov.uk/campaign/seatbelts-2024/#seat-belts>

21. <https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law>

22. <https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law/when-you-dont-need-to-wear-a-seat-belt>

23. Ibid

24. <https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law/if-your-vehicle-doesnt-have-seat-belts>

25. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carriage-of-passengers-in-campervans>

Section 4 - Driver views on road safety

In this section, we explored drivers' attitudes towards road safety more generally. We asked about the safety checks they carry out before a journey, and what they think makes the biggest difference to safety.

In question 6, we asked drivers what safety checks they carry out before making a journey.

We found that*:

80% always check all passengers over 14 have belted up before setting off

85% always check that any child passengers under 14 are in a correctly sized and fitted child seat or wearing a seat belt

56% always check that their head restraint is the correct height

41% always check that passenger head restraints are the correct height

*These percentages exclude drivers who selected 'Does not apply' in their response.

Most drivers are aware of the importance of checking all adults and children are wearing a seat belt before every journey; however, there are still a significant number who are not carrying out seat belt and other essential safety checks before every journey, which is concerning.

It is particularly alarming that 15% of drivers said they don't always check that any child passengers under 14 are in a correctly sized and fitted child seat or wearing a seat belt.



Child seats and the law

UK law states that children must normally use a child car seat until they're 12 years old or 135cm tall, whichever comes first.²⁶ However, Brake recommends that children should use a correctly sized and fitted child seat until they are 150cm tall.

You can choose a child car seat based on your child's height or weight.

You must only use a child car seat if your car's seat belt has a diagonal strap, unless the seat is either:

- specifically designed for use with a lap seat belt; or
- fitted using ISOFIX anchor points.

You must also:

- deactivate any front airbags before fitting a rear-facing baby seat in a front seat;
- not fit a child car seat in side-facing seats.

Booster cushions or backless booster seats should not be used for children who are under 125cm tall or weigh less than 22kg. As stated on page 15, as driver you can be fined up to £500 if a child under 14 is not in the correct car seat or wearing a seat belt.

26. www.gov.uk/child-car-seats-the-rules

Section 4 - Driver views on road safety

We also found:

- Only 69% of drivers aged 17–24 always check all passengers over 14 have belted up, compared with 87% of drivers aged 75 or older.
- 13% of 55–64-year-olds and 12% of 65–74-year-olds never check their head restraint is the correct height; just over a quarter never check passenger head restraints (27% and 26%, respectively).

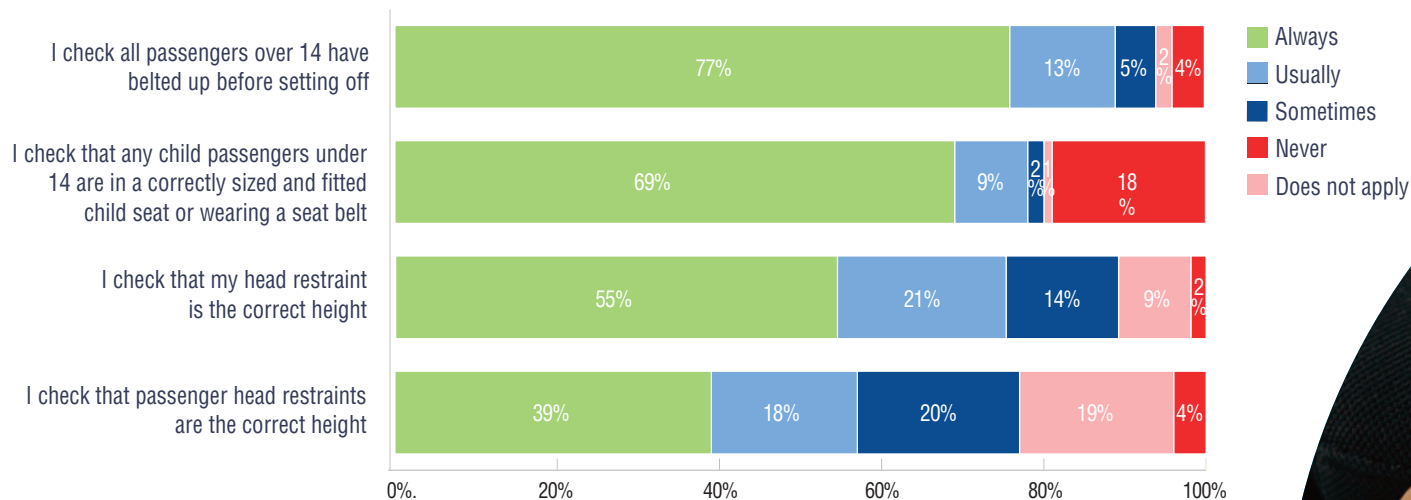
Head restraints help protect against whiplash and other injuries

Head restraints are an important safety feature, designed to limit head movement and provide support in a crash.

Head restraints should be set at the right height and position for maximum protection: the top should be level with the top of the driver's or passenger's head, and the restraint should be close to the back of their head, to prevent the neck from bending backwards in a crash, and increase the amount of time the head is supported.

Before setting off, make it a habit to check everyone has their head restraint properly adjusted. If a head restraint is missing, wobbly, or too low, don't use that seat until it is repaired.

Q6. When you are the driver, do you carry out any of the following checks?



Section 4 - Driver views on road safety

In question 7, we asked drivers what they think makes the biggest difference in safety terms when travelling in a vehicle*

72% said never driving after drinking alcohol or taking drugs

44% said always wearing a seat belt

36% said never using a phone when driving (hand-held or hands-free)

26% said never driving when tired

23% said always driving within the speed limit

Never driving after drinking alcohol or taking drugs was by far the most popular option. Always wearing a seat belt came next, followed by never using a phone when driving, never driving when tired and always driving within the speed limit. In truth, these are all key risk factors for road death and injury. Speeding, driving while distracted, drink- and drug-driving, and not wearing a seat belt are often described as the 'fatal 4' and are prioritised in roads policing strategies to reduce the numbers of people killed or seriously injured on roads.

In 2022, 1,711 people died on roads in Britain and a further 28,031 were seriously injured. An estimated 21% of those who died (approximately 359 people) weren't wearing a seat belt.

In the same period, drivers speeding or driving too fast for the road conditions contributed to 434 road deaths and 3,601 serious injuries. A further 257 road deaths (2,756 serious injuries) were attributed to a driver being impaired by drugs or alcohol, 59 deaths (522 serious injuries) to driver fatigue, and 22 road deaths (148) involved a driver using a mobile phone.²⁷

Q7. Rank the following according to which you think makes the biggest difference to safety when travelling in a vehicle. Drivers were asked to rank their choices from 1 to 5, where 1 makes the biggest difference to safety, and 5 makes the least difference.

	1	2	3	4	5
Never driving when tired	12%	14%	22%	25%	28%
Always driving within the speed limit	8%	15%	17%	27%	33%
Always wearing a seat belt	24%	20%	22%	18%	16%
Never driving after drinking alcohol or taking drugs	49%	23%	14%	10%	4%
Never using a phone when driving (hand-held or hands-free)	7%	29%	26%	20%	19%



27. Department for Transport (2023). RAS0701: Reported road collisions and casualties by severity, contributory factors and road user type, Great Britain, 10 years up to 2022

Victims' voices: Nick

In 2002, Nick was involved in a head-on collision with a three-tonne truck while driving to work. He was just 18 years old and wasn't wearing a seat belt.

Nick remembers nothing about the day of the crash, but he has been told what happened.

He says that as a driver he always took unnecessary risks, never wore a seat belt, and, in his own words, he drove "like a complete spectacle!". Nick knows that he was overtaking on a 60mph road when he crashed, but he doesn't know what speed he was travelling at.

He overtook two cars but drove into the path of a three-tonne truck travelling in the opposite direction. The head-on collision caused Nick severe, life-changing injuries, including a twisted brain stem and serious injuries to his legs. Because he wasn't wearing a seat belt, he also had two collapsed lungs.

After the crash, Nick was in a coma for more than three weeks, and he spent 14 months in hospital, where he had occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy. He now lives with reduced mobility and has had one leg amputated because he was experiencing severe pain.

Before the crash, Nick was a semi-professional footballer. Now, he says, all he does is watch football on the television.



Watch a short film where Nick talks to a Brake caseworker about the crash that changed his life on Brake's [YouTube](#) channel.

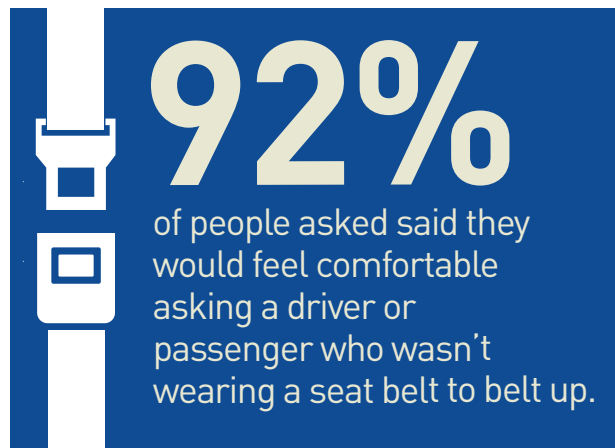


Section 5 - Belting up on every journey

In question 8, we asked more about the reasons why people may decide not to wear a seat belt.

An overwhelming majority (92%) said they would feel comfortable asking a driver or passenger who wasn't wearing a seat belt to belt up. Results were consistent across gender, age and region.

We then asked the 160 respondents who said they wouldn't feel comfortable asking someone to belt up to give their reasons.



33% would feel uncomfortable

11% would feel embarrassed

9% wouldn't know what to say

13% think it would make them cross

16% don't think it would make any difference

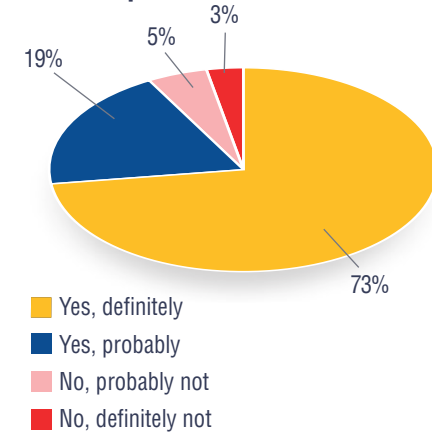
14% don't think it would be necessary

12% would only say something if they thought the driver might crash

22% don't know

Because of the small sample size, it's hard to draw any meaningful conclusions here.

Q8. If a driver or passenger in a car you were travelling in wasn't wearing a seat belt would you feel comfortable asking them to belt up?



Conclusions and recommendations

There is clearly a high level of public support for seat belts and the safety benefits they bring. However, this report also finds that many drivers still choose not to wear a seat belt in some situations, and this tallies with the high number of road deaths and injuries involving someone who wasn't belted up.

While the law puts the responsibility on drivers to make sure they and their passengers wear a seat belt, the enforcement of this is often quite minimal. Choosing not to wear a seat belt won't invalidate your insurance, but it may reduce the amount you can claim – a 25% reduction is standard if your injuries would have been avoided by wearing a seat belt, 15% if they would have been less serious if wearing a seat belt.

It is safer to always wear a seat belt rather than sometimes wearing one, whether for a short or long journey, and regardless of whether you are carrying passengers or not. A quarter of car occupants who died in road crashes in the last five years weren't wearing a seat belt, and many more of those received catastrophic injuries that could perhaps have been avoided.

From the findings of this report, we urge the following recommendations to make all road users safer:

Seat belt reminders

We welcome the requirement for seat belt reminders for all seats to be made mandatory under the revised EU General Safety Regulation. While the UK is no longer a member of the EU, we have previously called on the UK to implement these vehicle standards in full and we again reiterate this call.²⁸ The UK should also go further with our push for safety by drawing up standards for information requirements on the safety parameters of child restraint systems.

Awareness campaign focusing on seat belts and other safety features

The gap between the number of people who say they always wear a seat belt and those who say they actually wear one in every circumstance, indicates a potential gap in understanding of the importance of wearing a seat belt on every single journey.

The Government's latest seat belt campaign CLICK! is targeted specifically at young male drivers. While we recognise that young men are at particularly high risk on roads, we call for a more wide-reaching

campaign to remind all road users to wear a seat belt for every journey they make, to keep themselves and their passengers safe.

Given that 80% of people said they wear a seat belt to protect themselves in a crash, we recommend this campaign focuses on the safety benefits of belting up on every journey. This campaign should share information such as 'a fifth of people killed on our roads in 2022 were not wearing a seat belt'.

There should be a specific focus on driving at night because 42% of people killed between the hours of 6pm and 8am were not wearing a seat belt.²⁹

We also recommend an educational campaign to raise awareness of the benefits of other safety features, so everyone can make informed decisions to protect themselves. Only 37% of people surveyed felt confident they understand the benefits of certain safety features, including head restraints, air bags, load limiters and seat belt pre-tensioners.

In view of the safety risks posed to those travelling in older vehicles that lack some of the latest safety features – some of which will remain in use for years to come – there should also be a focus on safety for rear seat passengers.

28. <https://www.brake.org.uk/get-involved/take-action/mybrake/knowledge-centre/reports/vehicle-safety-systems-and-the-future-of-driving>

29. Department for Transport (2023) Reported road casualties Great Britain, annual report: 2022 and supporting data sets. Table RAS0711: Proportion of car occupant fatalities not wearing a seatbelt

Seat belts in taxis for drivers and passengers

The law exempting taxi drivers from wearing a seat belt has not been reviewed since 1993. Originally introduced to prevent passengers from using a seat belt to trap a taxi driver to their seat in order to steal their cash, this law now feels very outdated, especially as many taxis now have a Perspex divider separating drivers from their passengers, and fare payment is largely cashless. Technology has moved on significantly since 1993, therefore we recommend a review into this law to determine whether it is still appropriate to exempt taxi drivers from the requirement to wear a seat belt.



In this report, we found that 21% of people surveyed don't always wear a seat belt when travelling in a taxi, although it is a legal requirement to wear one if available. While some taxi companies like Uber are now introducing audio alerts to remind passengers to put their seat belt on, we know this is not universal.

Seat belts in minibuses, buses and coaches

The legal requirements for seat belts in minibuses, buses and coaches differ according to when the vehicle was first used. However, for all vehicles first used after October 2001, except for buses designed for urban use with standing passengers, three-point seat belts are required for all front-and rear-facing seats. We therefore recommend a review of the rules for all buses, minibuses and coaches that carry seated passengers to bring them into line with the requirements for newer vehicles.

Just 55% of people surveyed said they always wear a seat belt when travelling by minibus, bus or coach. Following the Government's CLICK! campaign urging young male drivers to wear a seat belt when travelling by minibus, bus or coach, we recommend a more wide-reaching campaign to remind everyone who travels by minibus, bus or

coach, that they must use a seat belt if one is available and are personally responsible for doing so. We also call on bus and coach operators to provide either signs or announcements to remind passengers that they must wear a seat belt, where one is available.

Expand projects like Operation Ping

We would like to see projects like Operation Ping expanded to address non-seat belt wearing more widely among those who drive for work. Results are due from the initial National Highways pilot programme that uses cameras on the Strategic Road Network to flag dangerous driving behaviours among fleet and haulier drivers, such as not wearing a seat belt and using a phone while driving.

A quarter of car occupants who died in road crashes in the last five years weren't wearing a seat belt, and work-related road traffic collisions are estimated to contribute to a third of UK road deaths and a fifth of serious injuries.³⁰ It seems, therefore, that expanding this project and others like it to help every organisation that employs professional drivers to manage work-related road risk – including encouraging seat belt use – is an important step towards our goal of achieving zero road deaths.

30. Ward, H., Christie, N., Walton, B. (2020) Driving for work A strategic review of risks associated with cars and light vans and implications for policy and practice

About the authors

About Brake, the road safety charity

Brake is a national road safety charity, founded in 1995, that exists to stop deaths, serious injuries and pollution on roads, and to care for families bereaved and injured in road crashes.

Brake campaigns for safe and healthy roads through seeking government policies and investment to end the carnage, and through projects that help communities, schools and employers promote safe and pollution-free streets locally. Brake delivers Road Safety Week, the UK's biggest road safety campaign.

Brake is the national provider of care and support to victims of road crashes and their families through the **National Road Victim Service**, helping families cope with the shock, turmoil and devastation that road crashes cause families across the UK every day.

For more information and to fundraise for the charity, go to www.brake.org.uk

To find out more about partnering with Brake to support our vital work caring for bereaved and injured road victims and campaigning for zero harm roads, for everyone, email corporate@brake.org.uk or go to www.brake.org.uk/partnerships

About AXA UK

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About AXA UK and Brake's partnership

AXA UK is a Strategic Partner of Brake, meaning they help shape strategy, develop work and achieve maximum impact. Brake selects Strategic Partners who are fully aligned with the vision, campaign goals and work, and can commit to working closely, usually for multiple years. Strategic Partners bring expertise, knowledge and time, as well as funding.

Find out more at www.brake.org.uk/partners

