

Traffic Safety Facts 1997

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration



Older Population



There are more than 24 million people age 70 years and older in the United States. In 1997, this age group made up 9 percent of the total U.S. resident population, compared with 8 percent in 1987. From 1987 to 1997, this older segment of the population grew 2.1 times as fast as the total population.

There were 17.1 million older licensed drivers in 1996 (1997 data not available) — a 45 percent increase from the number in 1986. In contrast, the total number of licensed drivers increased by only 13 percent from 1986 to 1996. Older drivers made up 10 percent of all licensed drivers in 1996, compared with 7 percent in 1986.

In 1997, 175,000 older individuals were injured in traffic crashes, accounting for 5 percent of all the people injured in traffic crashes during the year. These older individuals made up 14 percent of all traffic fatalities, 13 percent of all vehicle occupant fatalities, and 17 percent of all pedestrian fatalities.

Most traffic fatalities involving older drivers in 1997 occurred during the daytime (82 percent), on weekdays (71 percent), and involved another vehicle (75 percent).

In two-vehicle fatal crashes involving an older driver and a younger driver, the vehicle driven by the older person was nearly 3 times as likely to be the one that was struck (55 percent and 20 percent, respectively). In 44 percent of these crashes, both vehicles were proceeding straight at the time of the collision. In 28 percent, the older driver was turning left — 7 times as often as the younger driver.

Older drivers involved in fatal crashes had the lowest proportion of intoxication — with blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) of 0.10 grams per deciliter (g/dl) or greater — of all adult drivers. Fatally injured older pedestrians also had the lowest intoxication rate of all adult pedestrian fatalities.

“In 1997, older people made up 9 percent of the resident population but accounted for 14 percent of all traffic fatalities and 17 percent of all pedestrian fatalities.”

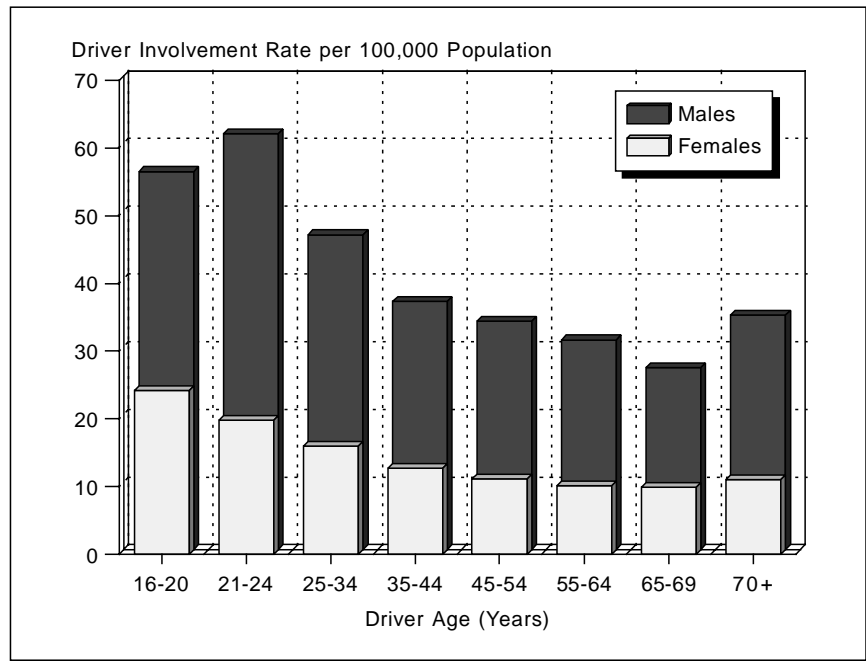
Table 1. Age and Alcohol, 1997

Age Group (years)	Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes			Pedestrian Fatalities		
	Total	Intoxicated	Percentage Intoxicated	Total	Intoxicated	Percentage Intoxicated
<16	343	12	3.5	644	25	3.9
16-20	7,670	1,095	14.3	300	86	28.5
21-34	18,038	4,428	24.5	1,010	486	48.1
35-54	18,290	3,492	19.1	1,623	688	42.4
55-69	6,084	547	9.0	730	173	23.7
70+	4,928	187	3.8	914	63	6.9
Total	* 56,602	10,080	17.8	** 5,307	1,544	29.1

* Includes 1,249 drivers of unknown age.

** Includes 86 pedestrian fatalities of unknown age.

Figure 1. Driver Involvement Rates in Fatal Crashes by Age and Sex, 1997

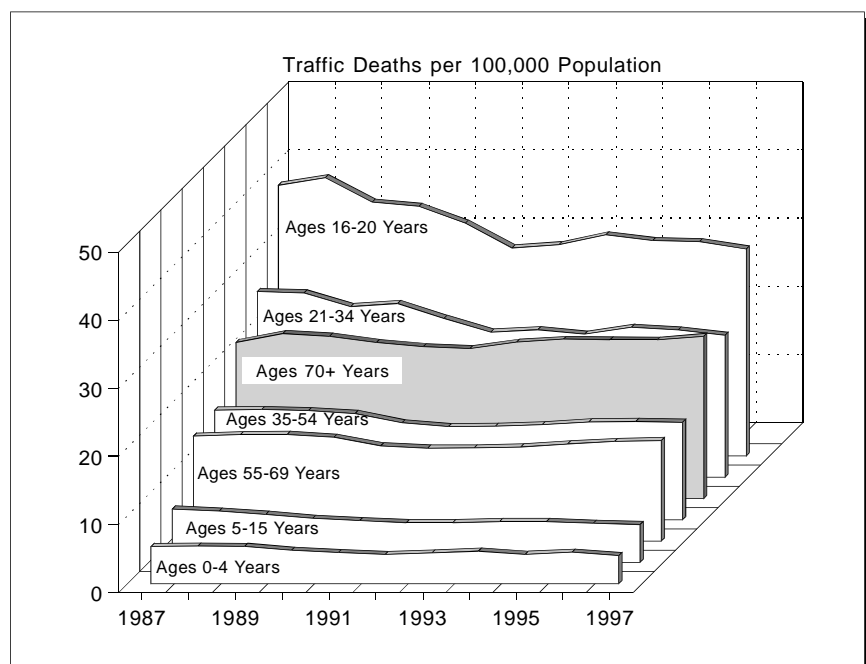


“Older drivers involved in fatal crashes in 1997 had the lowest proportion of intoxication of all adult drivers.”

More than two-thirds (70 percent) of all older occupants of passenger cars involved in fatal crashes were using restraints at the time of the crash, compared to 55 percent for other adult occupants (18 to 69 years old).

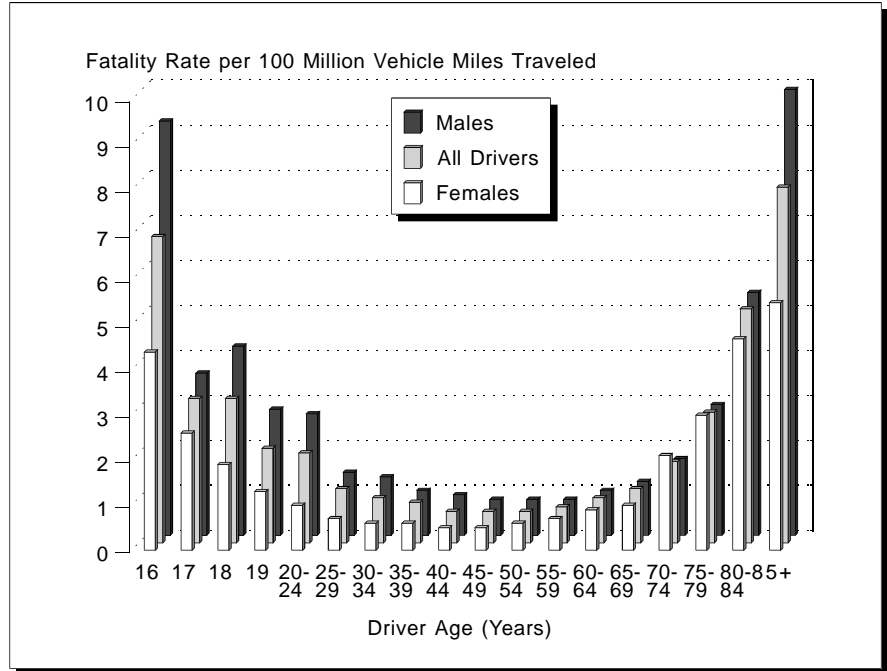
For older people, 67 percent of pedestrian fatalities in 1997 occurred at non-intersection locations. For other pedestrians, 82 percent of fatalities occurred at non-intersection locations.

Figure 2. Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatality Rates by Age Group, 1987-1997



When driver fatality rates are calculated on the basis of estimated annual travel, the highest rates are found among the youngest and oldest drivers. Compared with the fatality rate for drivers 25 through 69 years old, the rate for drivers in the oldest group is 9 times as high.

Figure 3. Driver Fatality Rates by Age and Sex, 1996



“On the basis of estimated annual travel, the fatality rate for drivers 85 and over is 9 times as high as the rate for drivers 25 through 69 years old.”

For more information:

Information on the older population is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. Telephone inquiries should be addressed to Ms. Louann Hall at 1-800-934-8517. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/nrsa>. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.

Table 2. Involvement of the Older Population in Traffic Fatalities, 1987 and 1997

	1987			1997			Percentage Change, 1987-1997		
	Total	Age 70+	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 70+	Percentage of Total	Number		Percentage Age 70+
							Total	Age 70+	
<i>Population (thousands)</i>									
Total	242,289	19,891	8.2	267,636	24,313	9.1	+10%	+22%	-11%
Male	117,961	7,524	6.4	131,018	9,548	7.3	+11%	+27%	-14%
Female	124,328	12,367	9.9	136,618	14,765	10.8	+10%	+19%	-9%
<i>Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes</i>									
Total	61,442	3,474	5.7	56,602	4,928	8.7	-8%	+42%	+54%
Male	46,884	2,452	5.2	40,658	3,308	8.1	-13%	+35%	+56%
Female	13,614	1,022	7.5	14,846	1,620	10.9	+9%	+59%	+45%
<i>Driver Fatalities</i>									
Total	26,833	2,196	8.2	24,644	3,364	13.7	-8%	+53%	+67%
Male	20,688	1,538	7.4	17,767	2,211	12.4	-14%	+44%	+67%
Female	6,143	658	10.7	6,750	1,153	17.1	+10%	+75%	+59%
<i>Total Traffic Fatalities</i>									
Total	46,390	4,555	9.8	41,967	5,802	13.8	-10%	+27%	+41%
Male	32,621	2,553	7.8	27,658	3,190	11.5	-15%	+25%	+47%
Female	13,757	2,001	14.5	14,068	2,612	18.6	+2%	+31%	+28%
<i>Occupant Fatalities</i>									
Total	38,565	3,353	8.7	35,693	4,815	13.5	-7%	+44%	+55%
Male	26,919	1,831	6.8	23,229	2,583	11.1	-14%	+41%	+63%
Female	11,635	1,521	13.1	12,259	2,232	18.2	+5%	+47%	+39%
<i>Pedestrian Fatalities</i>									
Total	6,745	1,160	17.2	5,307	914	17.2	-21%	-21%	0%
Male	4,777	683	14.3	3,615	546	15.1	-24%	-20%	+6%
Female	1,967	477	24.3	1,659	368	22.2	-16%	-23%	-9%

Sources: Licensed drivers — Federal Highway Administration. Population — Bureau of the Census.