

Motor Vehicle Accidents— Steering in the Right Direction



HIGHLIGHTS

- In the Region of Peel, motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death in children aged 1–19 years, and the second most common cause of death in young adults aged 20–44 years.
 - The mortality rate from motor vehicle accidents in the Region of Peel decreased between 1986 and 1996, despite an increase in the number of vehicles registered and an increase in the number of collisions in the Region. This trend is similar to that in Ontario as a whole.
 - Seat belt use and driving while impaired are important factors associated with motor vehicle accidents.
 - The proportion of Peel Region residents who always wear their seat belt is improving for drivers (from 72 per cent in 1990 to 82 per cent in 2001) and for passengers (from 59 per cent in 1990 to 84 per cent in 2001).
 - The 1996/97 Ontario Health Survey revealed that five per cent of Peel Region residents still reported drinking and driving over the past 12 months.
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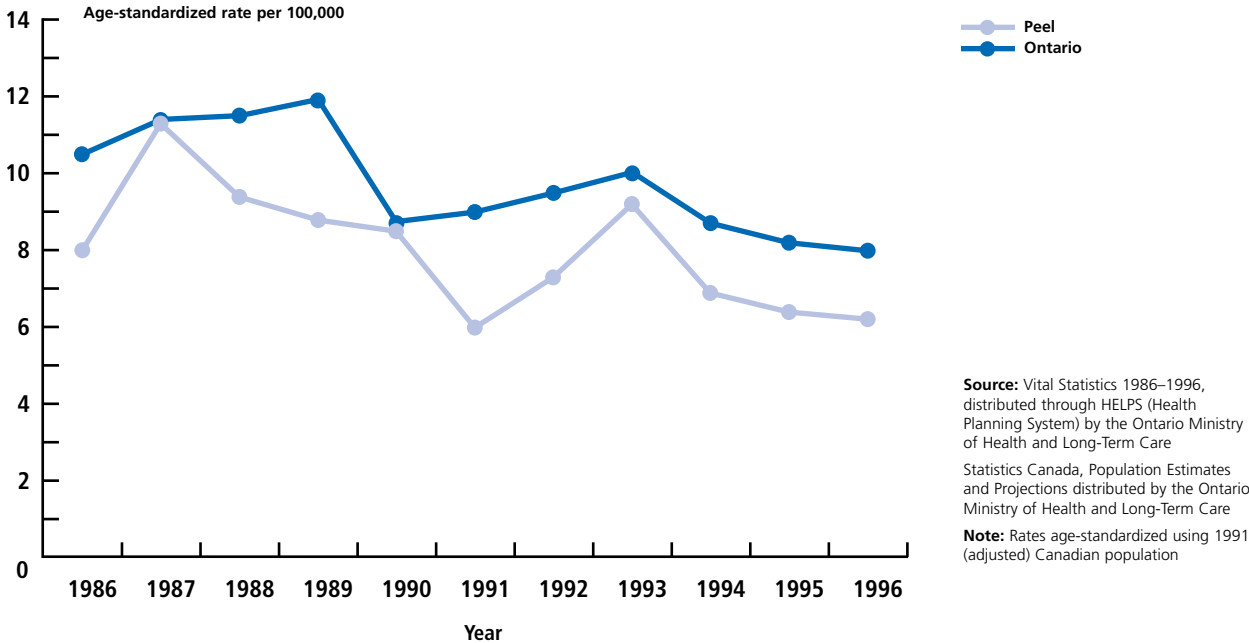
TRENDS IN MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT MORTALITY

In the Region of Peel, motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death in children aged 1–19 years and the second most common cause of death in young adults aged 20–44 years. In Ontario in 1998/99, 13 per cent of all injury related hospital admissions were attributed to motor vehicle accidents.^{8,9}

According to figures obtained by Peel Regional Police from the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, the number of vehicles registered in the Region has been increasing, from 620,056 in 1996 to 741,270 in 2000.¹⁰ The number of motor vehicle collisions has also seen an upward trend, from 15,741 in 1996 to 22,204 in 2000.^{10,11}

Despite an increase in population, vehicles, and collisions in the Region, the rate of mortality from motor vehicle accidents has declined over the past ten years (*see Figure 7 on the following page*). This suggests that motor vehicle collisions have become less lethal than in previous years. Mortality rates for males are twice as high as for females.

Figure 7 — Mortality from Motor Vehicle Accidents, Region of Peel and Ontario, 1986–1996



TRENDS IN FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS

A number of factors are known to influence the risk of injury and death from motor vehicle accidents. Two important factors are seat belt use and driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs.

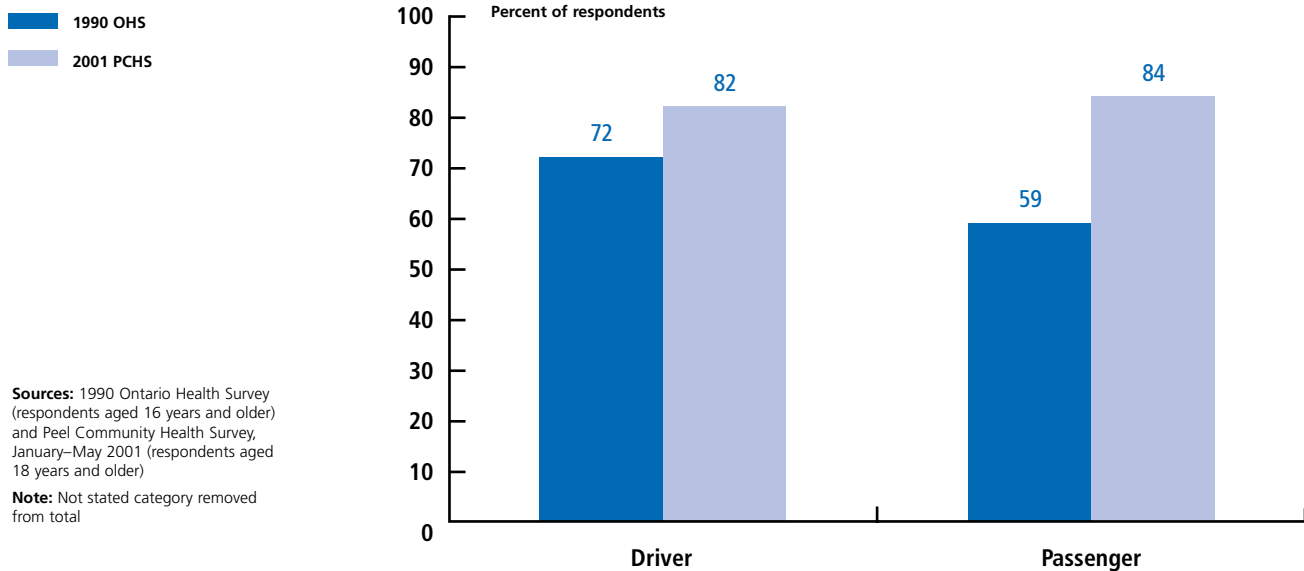
Seat Belt Use

Ejection from the vehicle and collisions with the interior of the vehicle or with another occupant are the causes of most motor vehicle-related injuries.¹² In a 2000 Transport Canada report, it is estimated that the 10 per cent of Canadian motorists who did not wear their seat belts in motor vehicle accidents accounted for 40 per cent of all occupants killed and 21 per cent of those who were seriously injured.¹³

In Canada, most motor vehicle related deaths in children are the result of the child being an occupant of the vehicle, as opposed to being a pedestrian or cyclist. Injuries are typically more serious among children who are not protected by a restraint system such as a correctly installed car seat or booster seat.¹² It is estimated that 30 per cent of children aged 0–4 years who were killed in passenger vehicles might have lived had they been properly restrained.¹³

Figure 8 (*see below*) shows the proportion of Peel residents who reported wearing a seat belt as a driver or a passenger. In 1990 data from the Ontario Health Survey of respondents aged sixteen years and older, 72 per cent drivers and 59 per cent of passengers reported always wearing their seat belt. In 2001, data collected through the Peel Community Health Survey for respondents aged eighteen years and older shows an improving trend, with 82 per cent of drivers and 84 per cent of passengers reporting that they always wear their seat belt.

Figure 8 — Driver and Passenger Seat Belt Use, Region of Peel, 1990 and 2001



Sources: 1990 Ontario Health Survey (respondents aged 16 years and older) and Peel Community Health Survey, January–May 2001 (respondents aged 18 years and older)
Note: Not stated category removed from total

Driving while Impaired

In Canada, approximately 1350 people die in alcohol-related traffic accidents each year, and thousands more are injured.¹⁴ The annual costs associated with health care, lost wages and property damage resulting from accidents that involve alcohol are estimated to exceed five billion dollars.¹⁴

In Peel Region, five per cent of drivers reported driving once or more in the past twelve months while under the influence of alcohol (1996/97 Ontario Health Survey). This is comparable to Ontario drivers (six per cent). Three times as many males (nine per cent) reported driving while impaired as did females (three per cent).¹⁵ Data from surveys such as the Ontario Health Survey in which respondents are asked about their own behaviour may underestimate the true occurrence of driving while impaired.

SUMMARY

Trends in both mortality and factors associated with motor vehicle accidents show significant improvement in Peel. However, motor vehicle accidents remain a leading preventable cause of injury and death, especially in children and young adults.