

Distracted driving rises among local college students

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According to the California Department of Motor Vehicles, distracted driving is on the rise due to an increase in the use of cell phones and other electronic devices and the increasing importance of these devices in individuals' lives. Studies have shown that phoning and driving increases the risk of crashes fourfold, with hands-free and hand-held devices equally dangerous. Texting increases this risk 8-16 times.

A team of experts from UC San Diego's Trauma Epidemiology and Injury Prevention Research Center analyzed [driving](#) habits in college and university students in San Diego County. The team will share the results at a media conference along with the California Highway Patrol at 10 a.m. today at the UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest.

"[Distracted driving](#) is a highly prevalent behavior in [college students](#) who have misplaced confidence in their own driving skills and their ability to multitask," said Linda Hill, M.D., MPH, clinical professor in the Department of Family and [Preventive Medicine](#) at UC San Diego School of Medicine. "Despite the known dangers, distracted driving has become an accepted behavior."

"This study highlights the high prevalence of distracted driving in college students, including [texting](#) while driving, something we see first-hand each and every day," said assistant chief Robert Clark, Border Division, California Highway Patrol. "The demonstration of misplaced confidence in their own and others' ability to multitask may lead to opportunities for us to educate and employ some risk abatement strategies."

Nearly 5,000 students from University of California San Diego, San Diego State University, University of San Diego, CSU San Marcos and eight smaller colleges in the region completed the study. The average age was 21 years old; 66 percent female; 83 percent were undergraduates; 17 percent graduates.

Distracted driving behaviors

78 percent reported driving while using a cell phone (talking or texting)

52 percent reported using hands-free devices at least some of the time

47 percent said they use hands-free at least 50 percent of the time

Only 25 percent used hands free with high frequency

50 percent said they send texts while driving on freeway

60 percent said they send texts while in stop-and-go traffic or in city streets

87 percent send texts while at traffic lights

Only 12 percent said they never text, not even at a traffic light

In addition to Hill, the UC San Diego research team included Jill Rybar, MPH, Tara Styer, MPH, and Ethan Fram.

Provided by University of California - San Diego

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