

Traffic fatalities spike during spring break

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Come spring break, college students from all over the country travel to warmer climates for time off from school and to escape the cold weather. However, it's not all fun in the sun. At popular spring break destinations, fatalities from car crashes are significantly higher during the spring break weeks compared to other times of the year, according to a recent study published in the journal *Economic Inquiry*.

"We found that between the last week of February and the first week of April, a significantly greater number of traffic fatalities occurred in [spring break](#) hot spots compared to other locations in the same states and at other times of the year," said Michael T French, professor of health economics in the Department of Sociology in the University of Miami (UM) College of Arts and Sciences, and one of the authors of the study.

"The primary implication is that roadways are dangerous during the spring break period, not only for spring breakers, but also for the residents and other visitors of popular spring break destinations."

The study examined fatal passenger vehicle crashes for 14 popular spring break destinations located in seven states: Arizona, California, Florida, Nevada, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. The title of the article is "Fast Times During Spring Breaks: Are Traffic Fatalities Another Consequence?"

Key findings include:

- The weekly death toll resulting from [car crashes](#) in the 14 spring break counties was 9.1 percent higher during the spring break season compared to other weeks of the year.
- This translates into 16 more traffic deaths per year in all 14 counties examined.
- There was a significantly higher incidence of traffic fatalities that involved out-of-state drivers than in-state drivers.
- Fatalities involving drivers younger than 25 years old were far more common than fatalities involving older drivers.
- There were no statistically significant differences between traffic fatalities involving drivers with alcohol impairment compared to those with no alcohol impairment.
- During the spring break season, there was no significant increase in traffic fatalities in non-spring break counties located in the same states as the spring break counties—supporting a true spring break effect.

Although previous studies have shown an increase in alcohol consumption during spring break, the current analysis did not find a significantly greater number of traffic fatalities involving alcohol. So, while the results indicate an overall increase in [traffic fatalities](#)

associated with spring break, it did not disentangle the possible mechanisms.

The study notes that spring break is an economic boom for host communities, so local governments should consider direct incentives for spring breakers to avoid driving during their stay. For example, any tourist with a valid college I.D. would be eligible for travel vouchers that can be used with taxis, public transportation, and shared ride programs.

"The out-of-state students could easily pick up these travel vouchers at the local chamber of commerce or visitor centers," said Gulcin Gumus, assistant professor in the Department of Management Programs at Florida Atlantic University and co-author of the study. "Travel vouchers are far more inexpensive compared to the loss of life."

As an extension of the current study, French and Gumus are now analyzing data on pedestrian fatalities in spring break hotspots.

Provided by University of Miami

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