

International lessons: Covid-19's effect on road safety

While South Africa saw a dramatic drop in road crashes and deaths during the 2020 holiday periods, the same cannot be said for many other countries worldwide. According to a study conducted in the USA, there was a 4.6% increase in road fatalities in 2020 compared to 2019.



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CEO of MasterDrive, Eugene Herbert, says researchers discovered some surprising results. "Even though the traffic volume dropped by 43%, the fatality rates were higher. Multi-vehicle collisions also decreased but, quite interestingly, an increase in crashes and consequently fatalities was seen with single-vehicle collisions. The chance of being in a fatal crash increased by four times and the chance of being in a single-vehicle crash doubled.



South Africa is the most dangerous country to drive in, study finds

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"Research conducted by the Department of Transport, local hospitals and the University of Connecticut, revealed three main reasons for this increase. These include speeding (94% increase), distracted driving (17% more time spent on phones) and increased risk-taking on the roads, particularly driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs."

While it is difficult to compare international trends to South Africa as stats for 2020 have not yet been released, we can still learn from these trends. "It is likely that even though road fatalities appear to have dropped in South Africa, it is possible there could also be an increase in single-vehicle collisions due to similar reasons as seen overseas.

"While many companies have returned to normal working hours, a large amount have not returned and will likely continue with remote offices until South Africa completes its vaccination schedule or until the economy regains some strength. Thus, as we continue into 2021, every driver should keep these stats in mind and resist the urge to take risks that you would not take if the roads were busier."

Avoid distracted driving

Open roads also create the ideal situation to speed, drive distracted or take risks without consciously being aware of it. "If the lack of other cars around you reduces your own ability to regulate your speed, find other ways to do this, such as setting a speed limiter if your vehicle has one. Despite the demands that working remotely often places on people, make a commitment to not take this into the vehicle with you or rather make use of technology that can help you balance this need.

"If you are struggling to deal with the stress of Covid-19 and your use of over-the-counter medications has increased, do not take this onto the road. If you feel more vulnerable to road rage or aggressive driving as a result of the additional stress, be aware of this. Ultimately, investigate the options available to manage the additional pressure and make use of these for your own safety and the safety of others on the road.

"We can learn from what international road data is revealing about new trends on the road. Assess your own driving and be honest about whether you are guilty of any of these habits. If you might be, take the steps to make the change," says Herbert.

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