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GEORGIA CAR ACCIDENT STATISTICS REPORT

*THE STORY BEHIND
THE NUMBERS*



Georgia Car Accident Statistics Report: The Story Behind the Numbers

Introduction

Consider this: During an average year 873,300 people in Georgia are involved in car accidents, and an average of 134,200 people suffer serious injuries from those accidents. Put another way, nearly 370 people are injured by car accidents somewhere in the state every day.

Behind each number is a real person, with a real family and real needs. Someone whose life changed forever when his vehicle was struck. Someone who worried about missing work or being unable to pay hospital bills. Someone who wasn't sure where to turn or who to trust after an accident occurred.

Why We Wrote This Report: Information Is Power

We didn't write this report in order to regurgitate a bunch of numbers and facts – there are plenty of official state research studies and statistical analysis that list the numbers in dry tables and graphs. We also didn't write this report to scare you or make you feel like a statistic – we understand that every story is different and that every case is unique.

The main reason for this report is to examine and explore *what types of accidents* happen in Georgia, *why* they happen, and *what we can do* to prevent them in the future.

Another reason for this report is to be sure that you understand that *you are not alone*. Although your story and your needs are different from everyone else that has come before you, millions of other people have experienced serious car accidents and injuries. Each person has handled his injury, recovery, and accident claim differently. How will you handle yours?

Who This Report Is For: Georgia Drivers, Accident Victims, and Their Loved Ones

We believe that everyone with a driver's license has a responsibility to understand the rules of the road and the challenges facing drivers in Georgia today. We hope this report helps Georgia residents better understand the dangers of getting behind the wheel and what they can do to help prevent accidents. We also hope this report helps accident victims and their loved ones understand what to do after an accident by answering some frequently asked questions.

In this report, we will answer the following questions:

- Why do Georgia traffic accidents happen?
- What are the most common causes of Georgia car crashes?
- How can I best prevent a car accident and injury?
- How can I best prepare for a car accident and injury?
- How do I deal with insurance companies?
- Who is responsible for my medical bills and other damages?
- What happens if my injury prevents me from working?
- What should I do after an accident?
- How do I know if I need an attorney?
- Who can I turn to for legal representation after an accident and injury?

At the Law Offices of Shane Smith, we believe deeply that the solutions to most problems start with gathering all pertinent information, learning and understanding the full story, and then taking legal action in a responsible and professional manner. We hope this statistical crash report and car accident guide will help you prepare to drive safely and to successfully pursue your car accident and injury claim in Georgia.

Ready to speak with a Georgia personal injury attorney right now? Call 888-927-6955 to schedule a free, confidential case evaluation.

Accidents Are Bound to Happen – Georgia Crash Statistics

Nicole and Sierra, mother and daughter, were driving in Gwinnett County, Georgia, when they came to a stop at a signed intersection. Before they could proceed, they were rear ended by another vehicle. Both women suffered back and neck injuries in the car accident. Nicole was taken by ambulance to Emory Eastside Medical Center and later admitted at Apex Healthcare, while her mother's less serious injuries were also treated. After they received the proper medical care and treatment, they came to our law firm for assistance in settling their injury claim.

This is the story of just two people in Georgia who were injured in a traffic accident. Each year, the number of people like Nicole and Sierra could fill not one, not two, but *three* professional sports stadiums. Every story is different. Every outcome is different. But the life of every person in each of those stadium seats has been significantly affected. You are not alone.

GDOT Compiles Georgia Crash Accident Statistics and Trends

In 2008, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) published the *Crash Analysis, Statistics & Information Notebook (CASI)* – a seminal report that is by far the state's best and most recent examination of how and why traffic accidents happen from county to county. The exhaustive report analyzes over six million crashes that took place between 2000 and 2006. Not only does the report crunch numbers, but it also draws conclusions about how similar accidents could be anticipated and prevented in the future. Let's take a closer look at an overview of some of the most interesting statistics found in the report.

Overview of Georgia Accidents, Injuries, and Fatalities

- An average of 1,700 people die in Georgia car accidents each year.
- An average of 873,300 people in Georgia are involved in car accidents each year.
- An average of 134,200 people in Georgia are seriously injured in car accidents each year.
- An average of 6,000 people in Georgia suffer catastrophic or incapacitating injuries in traffic accidents each year, including traumatic brain injuries, back and spinal injuries, and blunt force trauma injuries.
- In the city of Atlanta, an average of 140,000 car accidents and an average of 50,000 injuries take place each year. Almost 400 traffic accident fatalities are recorded within the city limits each year.

- In rural counties, an average of 80,000 car accidents and 40,000 car accident injuries take place in Georgia each year. About 700 traffic accident fatalities are recorded in these rural areas.
- Large commercial truck accidents are on the rise. Nearly 250 fatal tractor-trailer accidents take place in Georgia each year. About 5,000 people suffer serious injuries in commercial truck accidents annually across the state, and 20,000 people are involved in truck crashes.
- There were over 4,000 motorcycle accidents in 2006, and 3,000 of those crashes involved serious injuries. Of those crashes, 157 motorcycle accidents proved fatal.
- There were 2,542 pedestrian accidents in Georgia in 2006 causing 2,057 injuries. That year 157 residents died in pedestrian accidents.
- There were 937 bicycle accidents in 2006, resulting in 729 serious injuries. Just 17 cyclists died in vehicle-bicycle collisions in Georgia that year.

Overarching Accident Patterns and Trends

- While significantly more traffic accidents take place in metropolitan areas like Atlanta, significantly more accident *fatalities* take place in rural areas of the state.
- Rollover crashes accounted for just one percent of all Georgia car accidents, but resulted in ten percent of car accident fatalities.
- Crashes into a fixed object, such as a tree or utility pole, occurred in about 12 percent of accidents. However, more than 27 percent of all fatal crashes involved a fixed object collision.
- Three out of four accidents involved a collision with a moving vehicle, but less than half of all fatal accidents involved a two-car collision.
- Ninety percent of Georgia traffic accidents don't take place on interstates – and Georgia residents are significantly more likely to be involved in a fatal car accident while on a highway, state road, or residential street.
- Motorcycles are more prevalent on Georgia roads each year, and motorcycle accidents are also growing in number and rate. One out of eleven fatal Georgia car accidents involves a motorcycle.

Leading Factors in Georgia Car Accidents, Injuries, and Fatalities

The leading factors in serious car accidents can be organized into three categories: issues with the roadway, issues with the vehicle, and issues with the driver. Below, we look at how all three categories can contribute to an accident and injury:

- Two-way roads without a median or barrier
- Curving roads
- Driving at night
- Driving a pickup truck
- Riding a motorcycle
- Young and inexperienced drivers
- Older drivers
- Failure to use seat belts
- Following too closely
- Failure to yield
- Speeding
- Reckless driving
- Alcohol or drug use

As you can see, some of these factors have to do with road design and road conditions, and others have to do with drivers and automobiles. While you may not be able to make a road safer or avoid driving at night, you can change your behavior to closely match that of a safe and defensive driver.

In addition, it is important to note that many car accidents involve multiple causes: an inexperienced driver who is speeding on a two-way highway, or a pickup truck driver who fails to yield and who is not wearing a seat belt. Even eliminating one dangerous factor from your life can improve your chances of avoiding a serious accident or injury.

Georgia Pedestrian Accident Statistics

It makes sense that pedestrians are more likely to be seriously injured or killed in traffic accidents. Unlike vehicle occupants, safety features like seat belts or the metal framing structure of a vehicle do not protect pedestrians. Georgia laws protect

pedestrians by giving them rights whether they are in a marked crosswalk or in any part of any roadway. However, accidents still happen. When they do, they can have serious consequences.

- An average of 2,500 pedestrians are involved in Georgia traffic accidents each year. Four out of five (about 2,000) suffer serious injuries. Annually, about 150 pedestrians die because of car accidents.
- Driver error and failure to yield are the two most common causes of pedestrian accidents in Georgia.
- Half of all Georgia pedestrian accidents occur when a pedestrian is not using a crosswalk.
- Although only one out of one hundred Georgia car accidents involves at least one pedestrian, one out of nine fatal accidents involves a pedestrian.
- On average, one out of sixteen pedestrians involved in Georgia traffic accidents dies of his injuries.
- On average, forty pedestrians are seriously injured and three pedestrians are killed each week in Georgia.
- A pedestrian is 32 times more likely than a vehicle occupant to be killed in a Georgia traffic accident.
- Over 82 percent of pedestrians involved in car accidents are injured. In comparison, only about 15 percent of car occupants are injured in traffic accidents in Georgia.
- Although more pedestrians are struck on city streets in Georgia, pedestrian accidents are more likely to be fatal in rural areas, where speed limits are higher and roads are less pedestrian friendly.
- On average, one out of five pedestrian accidents in Georgia involves a child under the age of 15.

Georgia Car Accident Statistics: Child Injuries and Fatalities

Here's a shocking fact: The number of Georgia children ages 5-14 injured in traffic accidents each year would fill about 280 classrooms. While it is important to try to prevent all car accidents and injuries, it is especially important that, as parents and community members, we take extra measures to protect our children and keep them safe. Perhaps the first step in reducing the number of children injured and killed in car accidents is understanding how these crashes happen.

- Each year, about 7,000 children under the age of 15 are injured in Georgia car accidents—about 230 children each week.
- Infants and toddlers are the least likely age group to be injured in a Georgia car accident (injury rate: 50 per 10,000). However, the injury rate for children ages 5-9 is one of the highest (64 per 10,000) and increased between 2000 and 2006.
- Children under the age of five in Georgia are properly restrained in child safety seats only 68 percent of the time.
- About 30 children under the age of five are killed in Georgia car accidents each year. About 7,500 children are seriously injured in traffic accidents.
- Seat belt use is still around only 80 percent for school-aged children.
- A large percentage of children seriously injured or killed in traffic accidents are either on foot or riding a bicycle.
- Children are 2.5 times more likely to be killed in a pedestrian accident than in a car accident. They are twice as likely to be killed in a bicycle accident than in a car accident.
- Twenty percent of pedestrians injured in Georgia traffic accidents are children under the age of 15.

Safety experts agree that these facts and statistics show that a few simple steps can be taken to lower the injury and fatality rates for children in car accidents:

- All children should be properly restrained in car safety seats.
- Parents should be good car safety role models for their children by always buckling their safety belts.
- Children and drivers alike should be better educated in pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Georgia Car Accidents Caused by Speeding

In 2006, speed was a contributing factor in 20,000 car accidents. However, authorities are quick to add that it can be difficult to truly know if a vehicle was speeding in the seconds before a crash without a thorough investigation of skid marks, impacts, black box recorders, and other evidence that may not be collected in more minor collisions.

Why is speeding so dangerous? Safety experts say the answer is simply: the faster you are going, the less time you have to make decisions and control your vehicle. If you are speeding, it takes more time to stop and gives less time to maneuver hazards and to respond to the traffic around you. In addition, the faster you are going, the greater the force of the collision; that is, if you are speeding, you are more likely to be seriously injured or killed in an accident.

- Male drivers account for 85 percent of fatal car accidents in Georgia that involve illegal speeding or unsafe speeds.
- Unsafe speeding is one of the three most common reasons for fatal car accidents for drivers ages 18-20. The speeding citation rate is also particularly high for drivers ages 16-18 and 20-24.
- One out of 17 crashes in Georgia in 2006 involved unsafe or illegal speeding.
- Unsafe or illegal speeding is the second leading factor in fatal Georgia traffic accidents. Failure to yield was the only more common cause of deadly car accidents.
- Unsafe or illegal speeding is a factor in about 370 fatal car accidents in Georgia each year.
- Speeding is a factor in one out of six fatal car accidents in Georgia.
- You are three times more likely to be involved in a fatal car accident than a non-fatal car accident if speeding is involved in the collision.
- You are three times more likely to be seriously injured in a car accident if speeding was a factor in the crash.
- While many other types of accidents are on the decline in Georgia, the number of fatal speed-related crashes across the state is rising.

Safety experts note that there is often more than one factor that contributes to a car accident. In a significant number of cases, unsafe speeds and driving above the speed limit are contributing factors along with other common car accidents causes, such as driving under the influence, failure to yield, following too closely, or loss of driver control.

Now That We Have The Facts, What Can We Learn?

Let's return to the image of the three professional sports stadiums. All filled to capacity with just a year's worth of Georgia car accident injury victims. Every person in every seat has a different story. One person may have been drinking, speeding, and driving recklessly in the moments before his crash; another person may have had that driver crash into *her*. The bottom line resting under all of the statistics and facts? A car accident can happen to anyone at any time, regardless of the precautions you take or the knowledge you have. For the most part, you only have control over what you do to prepare for a car accident and what you do after you car accident.

Here are four ways you can prepare for a Georgia car accident:

- **Carry an accident kit in your vehicle.** Having a car accident kit can ensure your safety after a crash and make certain that you take the right steps toward documenting your crash. An accident kit should include: a flash light, a pen and notebook, a camera, a window punch, a blanket, a first aid kit, a whistle, warning triangles, gloves, and a poncho.
- **Make sure you have insurance coverage.** Be familiar with the details of your policy. While an inexpensive policy may be tempting, it may not be giving you the coverage that you need to protect you, your car, and your family. Review your current policy and read up on what you need in case of a serious accident and injury.
- **Avoid dangerous driving behaviors.** You've now seen the numbers. A huge percentage of deadly car accidents and serious injuries is caused by human behavior and driver error. Focusing on your own behaviors behind the wheel takes a huge step toward preventing future accidents and decreasing fatality rates. Review the list of common causes of car accidents involving driver negligence and error, and ask yourself what you can do when it comes to drunk driving, distracted driving, fatigued driving, tailgating, failure to yield, speeding, and reckless driving.
- **Buckle up!** The rate of safety belt use has been steadily rising in Georgia, to the point where 90 percent of adults are buckling up in the car. However, getting more people to regularly use seat belts and car seats is perhaps the easiest way we can save lives on Georgia's highways and interstates. Be especially sure that your child is in the right restraint for his height and weight, and that you are a good role model for your kids when it comes to safety belt use.

When It Happens to You, You'll Need Some Answers

It is a scary thought that although you can reduce your risk of being seriously injured in a car accident, you can't absolutely prevent a crash. However, you can educate yourself to make smart choices in the event that you are injured and that you need to file a car accident claim or injury claim.

At the Law Offices of Shane Smith, we often have clients ask us similar questions at their first meeting with an attorney after a car accident. Here are the top seven:

- 1. Do I have to go to the doctor right away?** Yes, it is better both for your health and for your personal injury claim to get medical assistance as soon as possible after a car accident. Realize that you might not notice some symptoms, like those of a head injury, immediately after a crash.
- 2. How do I know if I need an attorney?** If you believe that your car accident was not your fault, you may need an attorney. If you believe that someone else should be responsible for your medical bills and other damages, you may need an attorney. If you are unsure of the cause of your accident, you may need an attorney. Many law offices, including ours, offer free case evaluations – these are an excellent way to better understand your legal options and whether or not you may need professional help.
- 3. Can I trust the other driver's insurance adjuster?** Insurance companies all have one thing in common: they need to make a profit. Unfortunately, the best way for them to make a profit is to not pay out on claims. They have a number of strategies in place to maximize the chance of not paying for your damages, and some will even act in bad faith. Be very careful when dealing with insurance companies, and consider asking for an attorney's help before speaking with an adjuster or settling on a claim.
- 4. What should I do about my medical bills?** Your medical bills may be your responsibility, but they may be the responsibility of the person or entity that caused your car accident (the other driver, the entity that designed the road, or your car company, for example). It's not uncommon to have to cover some costs yourself, to have your health insurance cover some costs, or to have an auto insurance company cover your costs. When receiving medical care, be certain to closely keep track of all bills and costs.
- 5. What types of damages can I include in my insurance claim?** Think to yourself: How has this car accident and injury affected my life? Many accident and injury victims collect damages for medical care and hospital bills, lost wages, loss of future wages, pain and suffering, permanent disabilities, loss of quality of life, and property damage.

- 6. How long will it take to get compensation for my injuries?** This depends heavily on the details of your case, the complexity of your claim, and the cooperation of other parties involved. A relatively simple injury case might resolve with a fair settlement within a matter of a few months. A more complicated case—one that goes to court—could take longer. The most complex cases could take over a year, depending on the choices an injury victim makes while pursuing the claim.
- 7. What happens if I can't go back to work?** If your career is affected by your accident and injury, the person or entity responsible for your accident is also responsible for the consequences of the accident. If you can't go back for several weeks or months after your accident due to a lingering injury, you may be owed compensation for lost wages. If you can never return to your career due to a permanent injury, such as a chronic back problem, a traumatic brain injury, or an amputation, you may be owed compensation for lost future wages.

Conclusion

Car accident statistics can teach us one thing for sure: life is filled with opportunities to be responsible, chances to stay safe, and moments where we can make good, educated decisions. But life is also filled with unknowns, careless people, and plain old bad luck. Each time we get behind the wheel and drive on Georgia's roadways, we have some opportunities to make ourselves safer, but we are also taking a number of risks by sharing the road with others who might be less thoughtful and aware.

While you can't always control being involved in an accident, you can control your response to a crash and injury. By reading this guide and educating yourself, you're being proactive and taking a responsible step for the safety and protection of yourself and others. Life isn't always fair, but we do have a legal system in place that is designed to get justice for injury victims.

If you or a family member has been injured in a car accident, it is time to take control of the situation. At the Law Offices of Shane Smith, we can help you understand your legal situation, review your best options for action, and guide you through the process of getting the compensation that you deserve. Even if you are unsure of whether or not you have a claim (or wish to pursue a claim), a free, private consultation with one of our experienced attorneys can get your questions answered.

Contact Our Law Firm Five Different Ways:

- Call our office toll-free at 888-927-6955, or locally at 770-487-8999.
- Fill out our short electronic contact form.
- Visit our website at www.shanesmithlaw.com and chat live with someone who can help.
- Drop by our Atlanta office located at 235 Peachtree Street NE, Suite 400.
- Drop by our Peachtree office located at 263 Highway 74 North, Suite 200.

About the Author: Attorney Shane Smith

Shane Smith grew up in Fayetteville County and attended Georgia State University and Georgia State's College of Law, where he graduated Cum Laude in 2000.

Upon being admitted to the Georgia Bar, Smith joined the United State's Army Judge Advocate General's Corps. During his time in the Army, he served at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and Fort Benning, Georgia.

Following his military service, Shane moved to Peachtree, Georgia, and began working at a large Atlanta personal injury law firm. Four years later, he opened his own law firm with offices in Peachtree and Atlanta where he could focus on the clients and cases he cares about most: those who have been injured in accidents, those who have been injured by another person's negligence, and those who have been injured by intoxicated drivers.

Shane is admitted to practice law in all courts in Georgia and the military court system. He is also admitted to practice in the Middle District of Georgia.

Shane met his wife while studying at Georgia State University. They have two small children and look forward to raising their family in Georgia.

In addition to this guide, Shane has published legal guides regarding car accident property damage claims, car accident injury claims, and car accidents caused by drunk drivers.

Appendix: Accident Checklist

When it is too late for car accident prevention, you have to think about car accident mitigation, responding to your crash and injury in the best way possible and in a way that will minimize problems later. There are steps that you can take to help both your health and your potential car accident claim in the minutes, hours, and days after a car accident. Here's how:

Get Help and Medical Attention

Your first and most vital move is to take care of yourself and others at the scene of the accident. If anyone is injured or disoriented, call 911 immediately to request an ambulance and report the crash. Call the police if no one is injured but the accident damage is serious enough to warrant a report. Do not turn down medical attention if first responders believe you need it, and seriously consider a trip to the hospital as a precaution even if you aren't sure you are hurt.

Collecting Information About the Accident

Collecting information about your accident should start immediately after the collision and continue for days and weeks after the crash. At the scene, if you are well enough, collect the names and contact information of witnesses, the names of the first responders and police officers, take pictures or movies (use your mobile device, if necessary), and obtain insurance and registration information from any other drivers that were involved in the accident. After the accident, get a copy of the accident report, write a detailed report of the accident from your point of view, and look into the possible causes of the accident (for example, had accidents taken place at that spot or intersection in the past?).

Take Care of Your Vehicle

Again, if you are not preoccupied with your own medical health, you should deal with your car and its damage. After the accident, assess your car and take pictures and notes. Call a tow truck driver to remove your car from the scene. Review your car insurance policy closely and report your accident. Arrange for repairs or, if your car is totaled, consider your transportation options. Arrange for a rental car or alternative transportation while your car is being worked on or while you shop for a replacement.

Know Who to Talk to and Who to Avoid

Do not share your thoughts about the cause of the accident with other people who were involved in the collision. Under no circumstances should you apologize or say you are sorry, even if you believe you may have played a part in the crash. Although you may report the accident to your insurance company, avoid giving an official recorded statement until you have spoken to a lawyer and until you better understand what happened.

Arm Yourself With Knowledge

An informed car accident victim is a victim who can better stand up for her rights. Closely read your car insurance policy. Review the rules of the road in Georgia and consider whether traffic laws were being broken at the time of your crash. Understand the basics of personal injury law and consider speaking to an Atlanta car accident injury lawyer about the details of your case.