



January 14, 2011

Dear Colleague:

Every time I hear about someone dying in a car crash, I can't help but wonder about the circumstances. Did the driver and passengers fail to buckle their seat belts? Did a distraction, like a phone call or text, slow the driver's reaction? Was alcohol involved? Were children properly secured in the right safety seats? Could a simple change have saved a life?

Motor vehicle-related injuries are the leading cause of death in the first three decades of life. As the nation's public health agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is using science to better understand this problem and develop programs and policies that will change behavior to keep drivers, passengers, bicyclists, and pedestrians safe on the road every day. While we have made some progress in recent years in decreasing motor vehicle-related injuries and deaths, we can do better.

CDC has identified motor vehicle crashes as a winnable battle. With additional effort and support for evidence-based, cost-effective strategies that we can implement now, we will have a significant impact on our nation's health.

While CDC's work cuts across topics within motor vehicle safety, our efforts are focused in three areas:

- *Seat belts*: Increase the use of seat belts by every person, in every seat, on every trip.
- *Teen driving safety*: Keep teen drivers safe through graduated drivers licensing systems and enhanced parental involvement.
- *Alcohol-impaired driving*: Promote the adoption of ignition interlock programs and prevention strategies proven to be effective, such as sobriety checkpoints and zero tolerance policies.

While the magnitude of the problem is large – more than 90 people die every day on our roads – CDC's work with the *Community Guide for Preventive Services* has already resulted in notable successes in this area. For example, CDC provided the science to support the nationwide law establishing the legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit of 0.08%. We also demonstrated that seat belts – and the primary enforcement of seat belt laws that make people buckle up – save lives. Finally, CDC showed that sobriety checkpoints are effective at reducing drunk driving.

At CDC, we are in the business of saving lives and promoting health. We are committed to helping people live to their full potential, and are redoubling our efforts in motor vehicle injury prevention. Thank you for your support and commitment to working with us as we address this winnable battle.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention