

MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19 COMPLACENCY DRIVING RISE IN DANGEROUS ROAD BEHAVIOUR

Australian Road Safety Foundation research reveals increased risks being taken behind the wheel

With lower traffic volumes and congestion across the country, Australians are taking extra risks on the roads, which the Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is hoping to curb ahead of Fatality Free Friday (29 May).

To drive home the Fatality Free Friday message in the lead up, the ARSF has today released its annual research report, which shows one in four drivers admit to taking increased road risks since the implementation of Covid-19 lockdowns.¹

This is a frightening statistic, likely driven by the fact that two thirds of Australians believe the roads are safer under current conditions.

While it is expected that the road toll would reflect the lower volumes of traffic on the road, the national year-to-date road toll has only declined by 12.5 per cent compared to the same period last year.²

For example, the alarming research confirmed that speeding is already the most common road rule broken, with two in three Australian drivers admitting to being heavy footed. And now, in Covid-19 lockdown conditions, this dangerous driving act has increased by 17 per cent.

What's more, the most common risks being taken during Covid-19 after speeding include using a mobile phone behind the wheel (9% higher), running a red light or stop sign (5% increase), or driving after a few drinks (3% spike).

ARSF founder and CEO Russell White warned there is never an excuse to be taking risks on or around the roads.

"Sadly, with fewer cars on the roads during coronavirus, we're seeing an increase in bad driver behaviour, which is unacceptable," Mr White said.

"Road trauma at any time is tragic, but it's also largely preventable. While our incredible frontline medical and emergency services are already working harder than ever, is that text message or few extra minutes worth adding extra pressure on these resources?"

"For every road death, another 35 Australians are hospitalised. Don't let a split second decision change your or someone else's life forever."

As one of the country's largest insurers and ARSF's founding partner, Suncorp Insurance has seen first-hand the life-changing impacts of reckless driving.

"People may believe getting behind the wheel is safer at the moment with less cars on the road, but our claims research from 2015 - 2019 shows approximately 30% of accidents occur in the driver's own postcode."

"Even a short trip to the shops can be disastrous so drivers must not become complacent." Suncorp Insurance CEO Gary Dransfield said.

Shockingly, the research revealed that only seven per cent of drivers think about the safety of other road users when behind the wheel.

In addition, four in five Australians admit to breaking a road law, with the most common excuses including not paying attention (39%), a brief lapse in judgement (30%), or simply believing it was 'safe' to do so (20%).

¹ Research conducted by Pure Profile on behalf of the Australian Road Safety Foundation, April 2020, n=1,005 nationally representative by gender, age and location of Australian drivers aged 18 years and over.

² The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE), https://www.bitre.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/rda_mar_2020.pdf (accessed 31 March 2020).

Distraction also continues to be a common safety issue in the car. In fact, more than half of drivers admit to eating while driving, one third admit to using their mobile phone, and one quarter admit to looking away from the road at GPS or music for more than two seconds, which doubles the chance of a crash.

Australian Road Safety Foundation ambassador and motor racing champion Craig Lowndes said every road user is armed with the choice to make the right decisions when behind the wheel.

“Now is not the time to relax. There is no room for complacency on the roads now, or ever, and all lives must be top of mind for road users at all times,” he said.

“The stark reality is that any time you take a risk behind the wheel, you are putting the lives of every motorist, passenger, cyclist and pedestrian around you at risk. Together, we can save precious lives on our roads.”

The research also showed that not even having a child in the car is a deterrent to taking risks on the road.

One in three Australian drivers (29%) admit to speeding, using their mobile phone or driving distracted when kids are in the car.

Risky road behaviour continues to climb when driving with adult passengers, with half of drivers (50%) admitting to taking risks behind the wheel.

This increases to 62% when driving solo, despite the risk to themselves and other road users, including children.

The research has been released as the ARSF calls on individuals to #ChooseRoadSafety and demonstrate their commitment to reducing the road toll by taking the Fatality Free Friday pledge online.

In memory of the 1,195 people who tragically lost their lives on Australian roads last year, the ARSF is also creating a digital mosaic artwork that will feature 1,195 images of everyday people including families of road trauma victims, first responders, community road safety advocates and those directly affected by road trauma.

Road users can upload an image for the artwork until May 15 by visiting arsf.com.au/supporting-road-safety/ or take the Fatality Free Friday pledge online at arsf.com.au/take-the-pledge-fff.

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About ARSF:

The Australian Road Safety Foundation is a not for profit organisation dedicated to improving road safety awareness, enhancing driver education and reducing the impact of road trauma. The Foundation strives to improve road safety outcomes, develop research and education programs and work to inform policy makers on methods to address road safety issues. It also provides an umbrella organisation for other road safety programs and community groups. ARSF is helping to develop a sustainable strategy for reducing the social and economic costs of road crashes, as well as providing a platform for future research and advocacy programs.