

QuickSmarts

Distractions



Taking your eyes off the road for just two seconds can have devastating consequences.

The facts

- Using a mobile phone while driving multiplies your risk of a serious crash by four³.
- Research shows using a mobile phone while driving can be as risky as drink driving⁴.

Being distracted can be deadly

Mobile phone use is one of the most common risky driving behaviours on the road. A 2018 survey of 3,000 Queensland drivers⁶ found:

- seventy percent of Queenslanders use their mobile phone illegally in the car
- texting is the most common behaviour, with forty-eight percent of drivers admitting to texting at traffic and twenty two percent of drivers saying they text while driving
- forty-six percent of drivers check email, social media and the internet at traffic lights, and forty-two percent do so while driving.

On average 25 people are killed and 1235 seriously injured each year on Queensland roads as a result of crashes where driver distraction played a part¹.

However, the true extent to which distractions (including mobile phones) contribute to road crashes is likely to be higher because drivers may not admit to police they were distracted at the time of the crash.

Despite the dangers, approximately 70% of Queenslanders admit to using their mobile phone illegally in the car².

Using a mobile phone increases your risk of a crash – by four times

Driving is a task that requires all your attention. Using a mobile phone while driving – especially texting – is distracting and can lead to⁵:

- riskier decision making – using a mobile phone while driving affects judgement and concentration
- slower reactions – you generally have a slower reaction when using a mobile phone, particularly when you're deep in conversation. You may take longer to respond to traffic signals or completely miss them
- slower, less controlled braking – during a mobile phone call, your brake reaction time is slower and you brake with more force and less control. This results in shorter stopping distances between you and the car in front
- not being alert to surroundings – when using a mobile phone, we spend less time checking mirrors and what's going on around us. This affects our ability to monitor and negotiate traffic safely.

Even the smallest distraction can be deadly

The unexpected can happen at any time – so even the smallest distraction can be deadly. Using a mobile phone when driving means taking your eyes and mind off the road – which can have serious consequences.

Even when your eyes are off the road for just two seconds, a vehicle moving at 60km/h travels more than 33 metres. The average person's time to react to an event is 1.8 seconds. This means nearly four seconds can pass before the average distracted driver can react to a hazard, increasing their risk of a serious crash.

This table shows the distance travelled in two seconds by a driver at various speeds

Travel speed	Distraction time	Distance travelled
40 km/h	2 seconds	22.2 metres
50 km/h	2 seconds	27.8 metres
60 km/h	2 seconds	33.3 metres
80 km/h	2 seconds	44.4 metres
100 km/h	2 2 seconds	55.6 metres

Tips for staying focused on the roads

- Switch your phone to silent or flight mode as soon as you get behind the wheel.
- Let everyone know you're driving 'phone-free' and remove pressure to be in contact.
- Phone home before you leave work and check if you need to pick something up on the way home.
- If you're driving with passengers, designate a 'texter' so you can concentrate on driving.
- Pull over and park safely before picking up your phone.

MythBusters

“Using my mobile phone isn't that dangerous”

The danger of using a phone while driving can't be underestimated. Research shows a driver's response time while texting on a phone is comparable to that of a driver with a blood alcohol reading of between 0.07 and 0.107.

Using a mobile phone while driving is distracting in many ways:

- physical – a driver's hand is moved from the steering wheel to pick up the phone, answer or end the call, or type a message
- visual – a driver's eyes are diverted from the road to look for the phone, view the buttons or read a message
- auditory – caused when the driver's attention is drawn to the phone ringing or buzzing
- cognitive – even the most experienced drivers have difficulty processing two or more pieces of information at the same time. Talking on a mobile phone while driving may cause lapses of attention, concentration and judgement⁸.

“I can quickly check a text message when driving”

Text messaging while driving is especially dangerous⁹. It results in physical, visual, auditory and cognitive distraction which can mean:

- incorrect lane changes or swerving
- travelling at inconsistent speeds
- missing road signs, hazards like dropped road edges or pedestrians, cyclists or road workers.

“Talking on a mobile phone while driving is the same as talking to a passenger”

Talking to a passenger is less distracting than talking on a mobile phone. If a dangerous situation develops, the passenger can stop talking to allow the driver to concentrate¹⁰.

MythBusters

“I’m a good driver so I can multitask”

A good driver concentrates on the road at all times because the unexpected – like a pedestrian stepping out from behind a vehicle or cars quickly passing or merging – can happen anywhere at any time. No matter how well we think we multitask, the performance of one task is hampered by the other.

“It’s safe to use my mobile phone while stopped in traffic or at traffic lights”

It’s illegal to use a handheld mobile phone at any time while driving, unless you are safely and legally parked. Drivers are slower to react when using a mobile phone, taking longer to respond to traffic signals or missing them completely. You could also be tempted to continue to use your phone as you slow down to a stop in traffic or as you take off again. It’s safer to avoid the temptation and keep your hands and eyes off your phone.

- 1 Data Analysis, Department of Transport and Main Roads QLD. Fatality data extracted. 27 June 2018 using road casualty statistics 2013-2017.
- 2 Footprints Market Research. (2018). ‘Understanding Risky Driving Behaviour’. Research undertaken for the Department of Transport and Main Roads and BCM Partnership, Brisbane.
- 3 McEvoy, S., Stevenson, M., McCart, A., Woodward, M., Haworth, C., Palamara, P. and Cercarelli, R. (2005). ‘Role of mobile phones in motor vehicle crashes resulting in hospital attendance: a case-crossover study’. *BMJ* 331: 428-30.
- 4 Stayer, D., Drews, F. and Crouch, D. (2006). ‘A comparison of the cell phone driver and the drunk driver.’ *Human Factors* 48(2): 381-91.
- 5 See, for example: McKeever, J., Schultheis, M., Padmanaban, V. and Blasco, A. (2013). ‘Driver performance while texting: even a little is too much’. *Traffic Injury Prevention* 14: 132-137; Caird, J., Johnston, K., Willness, C., Asbridge, M. and Steel, P. (2014). ‘A meta-analysis of the effects of texting on driving’. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 71: 311-318; and Beede, K. and Kass, S. (2006). ‘Engrossed in conversation: the impact of cell phones on simulated driving performance’. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 38: 415-421.
- 6 Footprints Market Research. (2018). ‘Understanding Risky Driving Behaviour’. Research undertaken for the Department of Transport and Main Roads and BCM Partnership, Brisbane.
- 7 Leung, S., Croft, R., Jackson, M., Howard, M., and McKenzie, R. (2012). ‘A comparison of the effect of mobile phone use and alcohol consumption on driving simulation performance’. *Traffic Injury Prevention* 13: 566-574.
- 8 Young, K., Regan, M. and Hammer, M. (2003). *Driver distraction: a review of the literature*. Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC), Report No. 206. Clayton, Vic: MUARC.
- 9 Fitch, G., Soccolich, S., Guo, F., McClafferty, J., Fang, Y., Olson, R., Perez, M., Hanowski, R., Hankey, J. and Dingus, T. A. (2013). *The impact of hand-held and hands-free cell phone use on driving performance and safety-critical event risk*. Report No. DOT HS 811 757. Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).
- 10 Charlton, S. G. (2009). ‘Driving while conversing: cell phones that distract and passengers who react’. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 41: 160-173.

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