



Department
for Transport

Seatbelt and mobile phone use surveys: Great Britain, 2017

About this release

This release provides an overview on the proportion of drivers observed using a hand-held mobile phone and the proportion of drivers and passengers wearing seatbelts whilst driving in Great Britain, from a roadside observation survey commissioned jointly between the Department for Transport and Transport Scotland.

Hand-held mobile phone use observations were made at both stationary and moving traffic sites. Observations of seatbelt use were made at stationary traffic sites only, e.g. at traffic light junctions. Unless otherwise specified, results are presented for weekdays.

This release provides proportions for Great Britain. Comparisons have also been made between England and Wales and Scotland within the statistical tables that accompany the release.

Since 1988 the Department for Transport has commissioned surveys on seatbelt use by vehicle occupants on the national road network. Since 2002, similar surveys for driver mobile phone use have also been undertaken.

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Mobile phone use

- In 2017, 1.1% of drivers were observed using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving on weekdays in Great Britain, of which 0.4% were observed holding the phone **to their ear** and 0.8% holding the phone **in their hand**.
- This compares to 1.6% of all drivers observed using a mobile phone in the previous survey in 2014 in England and Scotland combined.
- In England and Wales, 0.6% of drivers were observed using a hand-held device whilst driving in 2017, compared to 2.0% in Scotland.
- For **car drivers**, 1.0% were observed using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving in Great Britain in 2017.

Seatbelt use

- In Great Britain, 96.5% of **drivers** were observed using a seatbelt on weekdays in 2017.
- This compares to 95.3% of all drivers observed using a seatbelt in the previous survey in 2014 in England and Scotland combined.
- In 2017, 93.1% of **front seat passengers** and 90.7% of **rear seat passengers** were observed using a seatbelt in Great Britain.
- For **car drivers**, 98.6% were observed using a seatbelt in Great Britain in 2017.

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Mobile phone survey - headline statistics

Observations of mobile phone use were made at sites with both stationary and moving traffic. In this release, results are presented for weekdays and moving sites (unless otherwise specified) to ensure the results are comparable to the previous surveys. The results of the mobile phone survey can be used to assess compliance with the legislation in Great Britain.

In 2017, 1.1% of drivers were observed using a mobile phone whilst driving on weekdays in Great Britain. This rate was higher in Scotland (2.0%) than in England and Wales (0.6%).

Rates of mobile phone use are slightly lower when restricting to car drivers only (1.0% in Great Britain in 2017).

Definition

A **hand-held mobile phone** is defined as a device that is being held by the driver at the time of observation. The driver may be receiving or making a call, texting or reading a text, or using it for some other interactive function. It was not possible for observers to determine what the mobile phone was being used for, but a distinction was made between drivers holding the phone **to their ear** or holding it **in their hand**. No data was collected on hands-free use of mobile phones whilst driving.

Chart 1: Hand-held mobile phone use, 2017

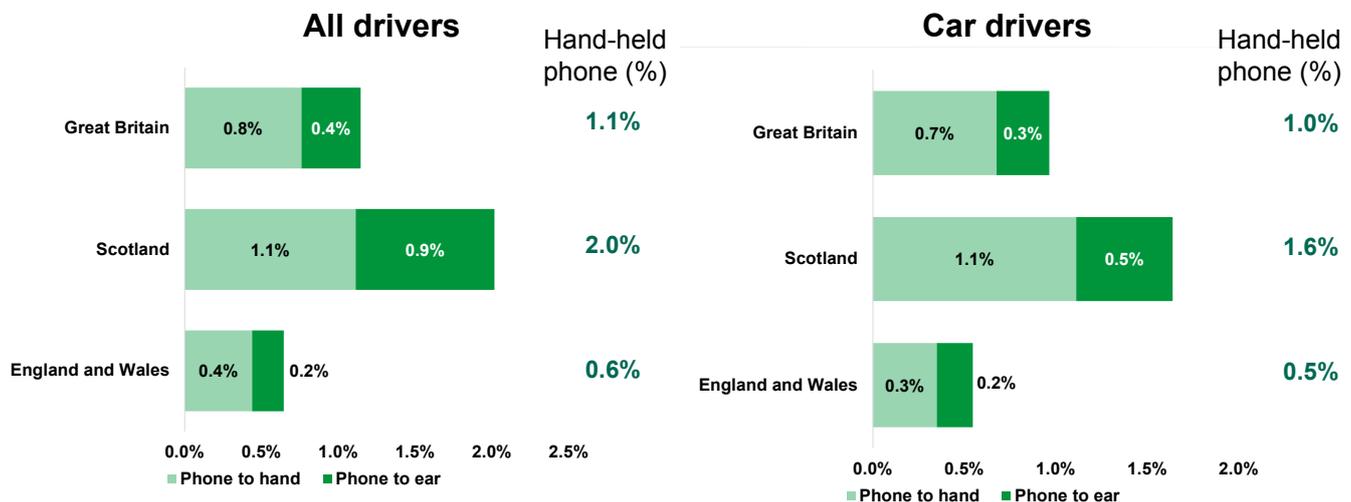
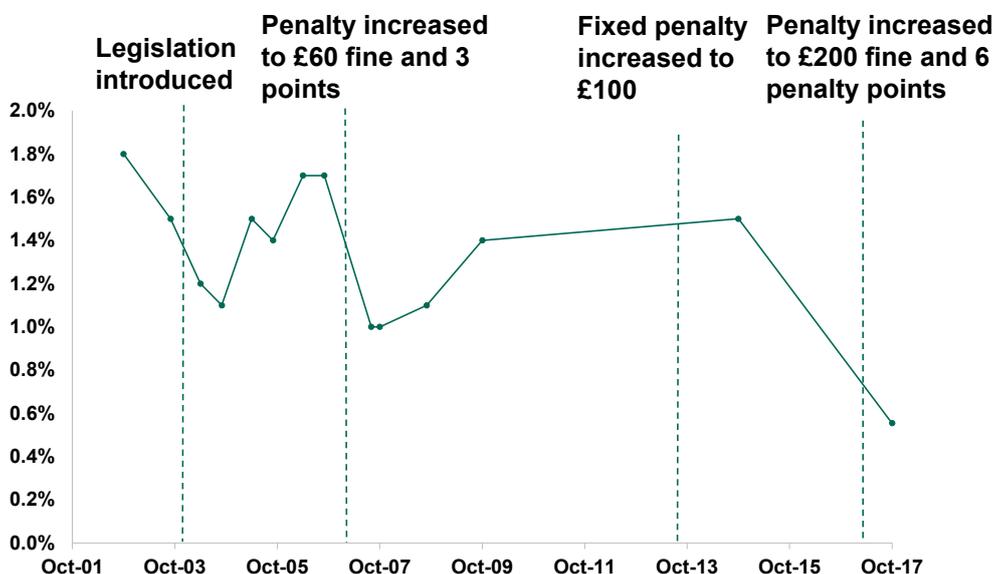


Chart 2: Hand-held mobile phone use by car drivers, England (2002-2014), England and Wales (2017)



Geographical coverage

The 2017 survey included 2 moving sites in Wales so the figure in this chart is for England and Wales for this year. Figures for earlier years are for England only. Changes in the methodology and geographical coverage of the survey sites mean that figures are not directly comparable to previous years.

Includes taxi/private hire vehicles

For car drivers (including taxi and private hire vehicle drivers), hand-held mobile phone use whilst driving has reduced compared to the last survey (chart 2). In 2014, 1.5% of car drivers were observed using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving in England compared to 0.6% of car drivers in England and Wales in 2017. This reduction could be linked to the change in legislation of March 2017, **however, this does not imply causation or prove the effectiveness of the policy.** In this chart, car occupants include observations for taxi and private hire vehicles for consistency with previous surveys.

Background on legislation

In December 2003, legislation was introduced making it illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving or riding a motor vehicle on the road. Drivers caught using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving may be issued with a fixed penalty notice with points on the driving licence and a fine. In February 2007, the penalty for using a mobile phone whilst driving increased from a £30 fine to a £60 fine and three driving licence points. These fines increased to £100 in 2013 and then again to £200 and 6 penalty points in March 2017, with a maximum fine of £1,000 (£2,500 if driving a lorry or bus) if the case goes to court. If a case goes to court, the driver or rider may be disqualified from driving or riding. Drivers or riders can use hands-free phones, sat navs and 2-way radios when driving or riding. However, if the police think the driver or rider is distracted and not in control of their vehicle they could still get stopped and penalised.

Further information on the law on using a mobile phone whilst driving can be found at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2003/2695/regulation/2/made> and <https://www.gov.uk/using-mobile-phones-when-driving-the-law>

Stationary sites are used to analyse characteristics on mobile phone use where observations cannot be made in a moving vehicle, for the age of the driver and whether passengers are present in the vehicle. Rates of mobile phone use are higher at stationary sites compared to moving sites. In 2017, 2.1% of drivers were observed using a mobile phone whilst stationary in Great Britain (2.2% in England and Wales and 2.5% in Scotland).

Results at moving sites are not directly comparable to those at stationary sites because drivers' mobile phone use whilst stationary at a junction may not be representative of their general use whilst driving. The higher rate at stationary sites might be due to drivers believing it is safer to use a hand-held mobile phone in stationary traffic or wrongly thinking it is legal to use a hand-held mobile phone whilst stationary.

In the 2014 survey, 2.3% of drivers were observed using a mobile phone whilst stationary in England and Scotland (2.5% in England and 1.7% in Scotland).

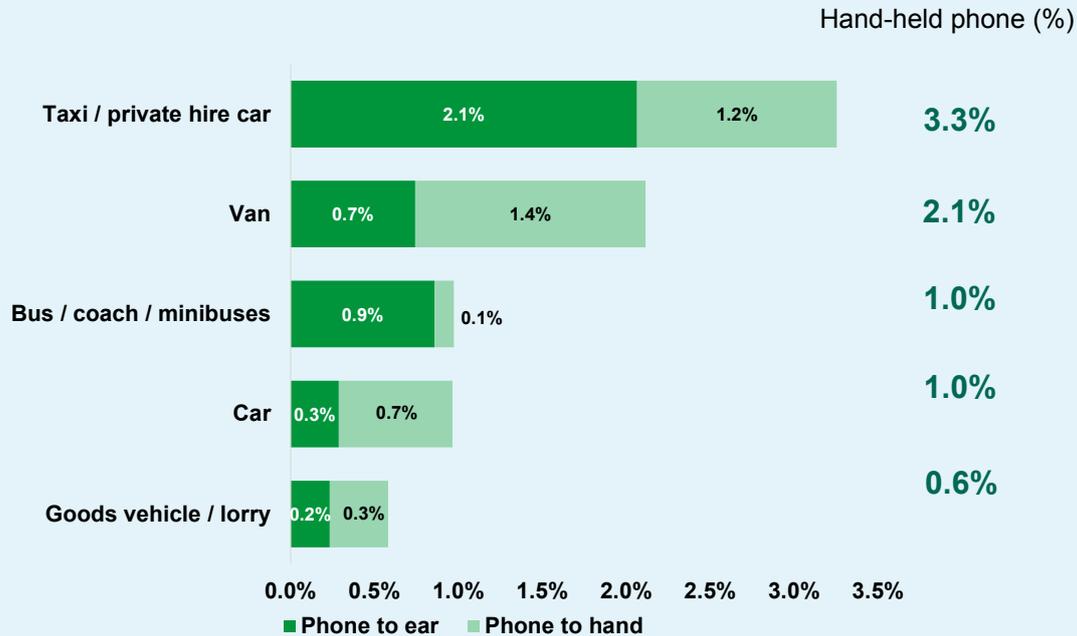
Stationary sites were located at traffic light junctions and observed drivers behaviour whilst the vehicles were stationary (being held by a red light).

Moving sites were located at pavements or laybys to make observations of moving traffic.

Vehicle Type

In 2017, the highest proportion of drivers using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving was amongst taxi/private hire vehicle drivers (3.3%). The higher rate for this category is mostly driven by a higher rate in Scotland, which is based on a relatively small sample. Caution should be used when interpreting these figures.

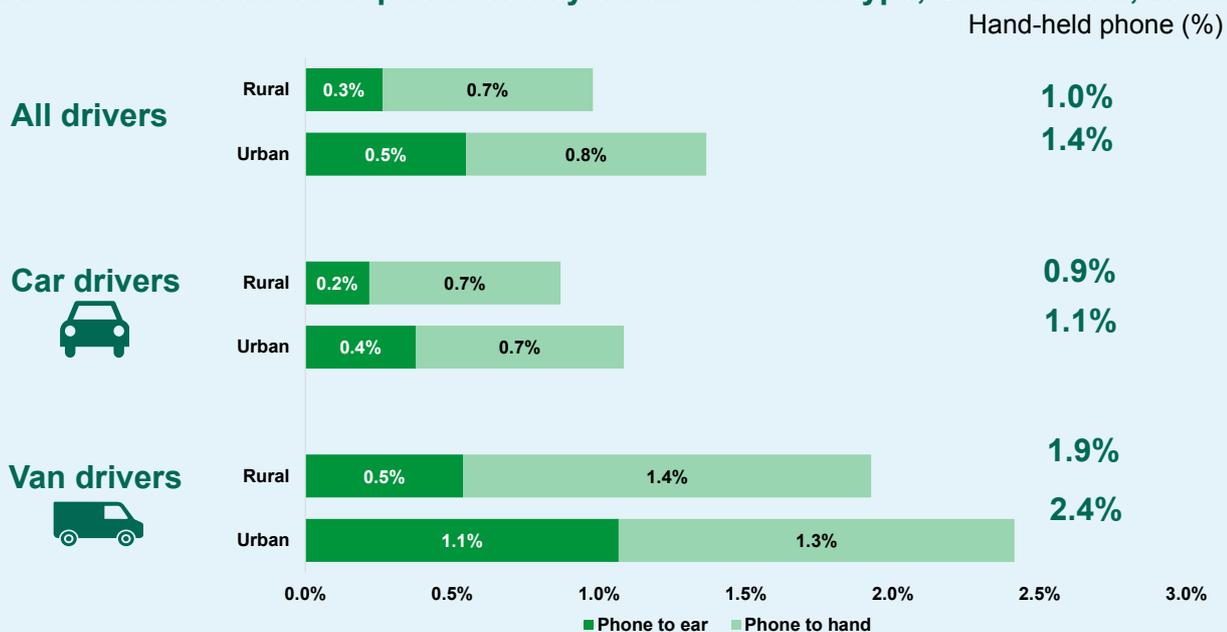
Chart 3: Hand-held mobile phone use by vehicle type, Great Britain, 2017



Road type

In Great Britain, a higher proportion of drivers were observed using a mobile phone on urban roads compared to rural roads.

Chart 4: Hand-held mobile phone use by urban/rural road type, Great Britain, 2017

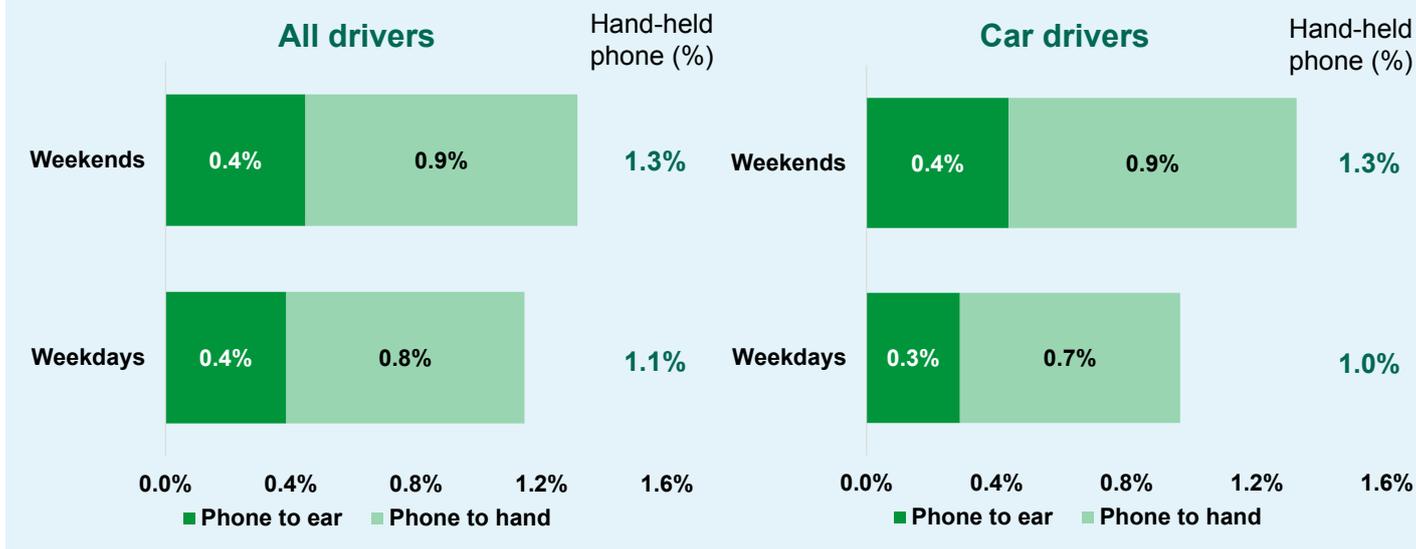


For all drivers and car drivers in Great Britain, the proportion of hand-held phone use whilst driving were similar on major and minor roads. Definitions on road types can be found on page 10.

Time of week

Headline statistics in this release were calculated for weekdays for comparability with earlier years, however some sites were observed at weekends to enable comparisons to be made. In Great Britain, there was a higher proportion of hand-held mobile phone use on weekends compared to weekdays in 2017, both for all drivers and for car drivers.

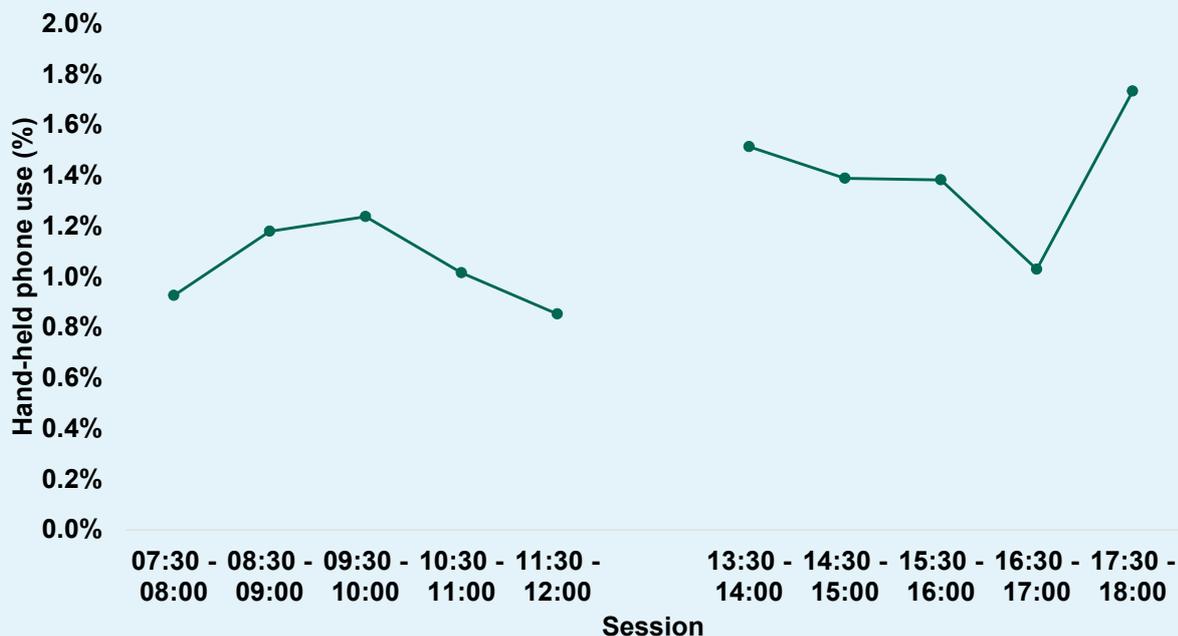
Chart 5: Hand-held mobile phone use by weekday/weekend, Great Britain, 2017



Time of day

Observations were made in half hour sessions during the survey. The afternoon survey sessions had higher rates of hand-held mobile phone use from 13:30 onwards, with the exception of 16:30 to 17:00. The highest proportion of drivers using a mobile phone whilst driving were observed between 17:30 to 18:00 on weekdays in Great Britain. Results by time of day should be treated with caution as differences may be due to random variation rather than representing real changes.

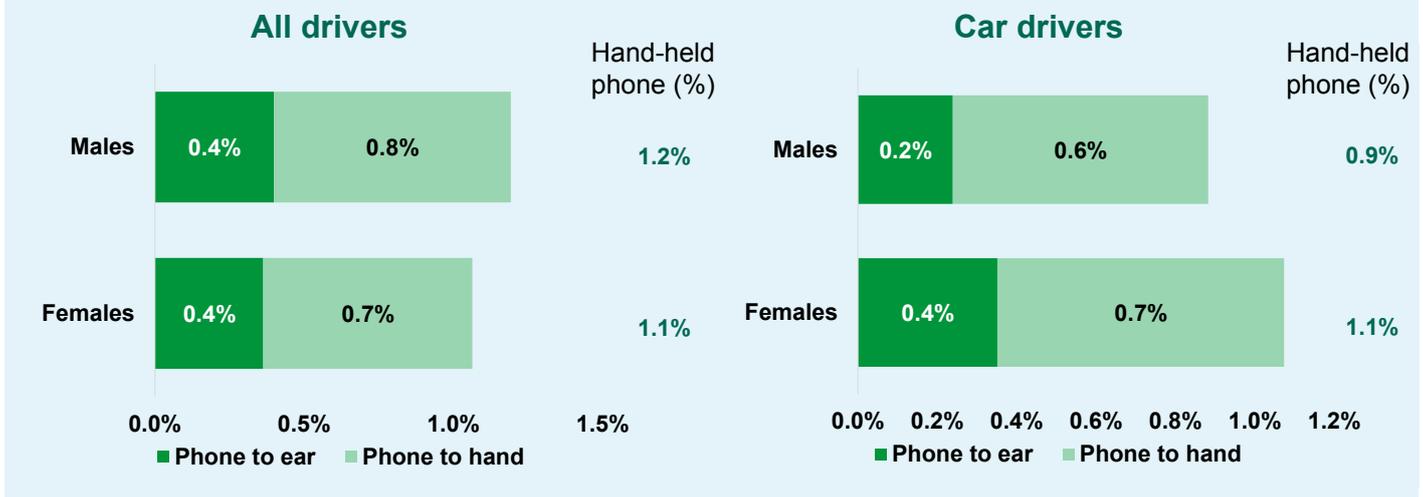
Chart 6: Hand-held mobile phone use by time of day, Great Britain, 2017



Gender of driver

In 2017, a higher proportion of **male** drivers (1.2%) were observed using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving than **female** drivers (1.1%). For car drivers, a higher proportion of females (1.1%) were observed using a hand-held mobile phone whilst driving in Great Britain compared to males (0.9%). This is driven by a lower rate for male drivers in Scotland.

Chart 7: Hand-held mobile phone use by gender, Great Britain, 2017

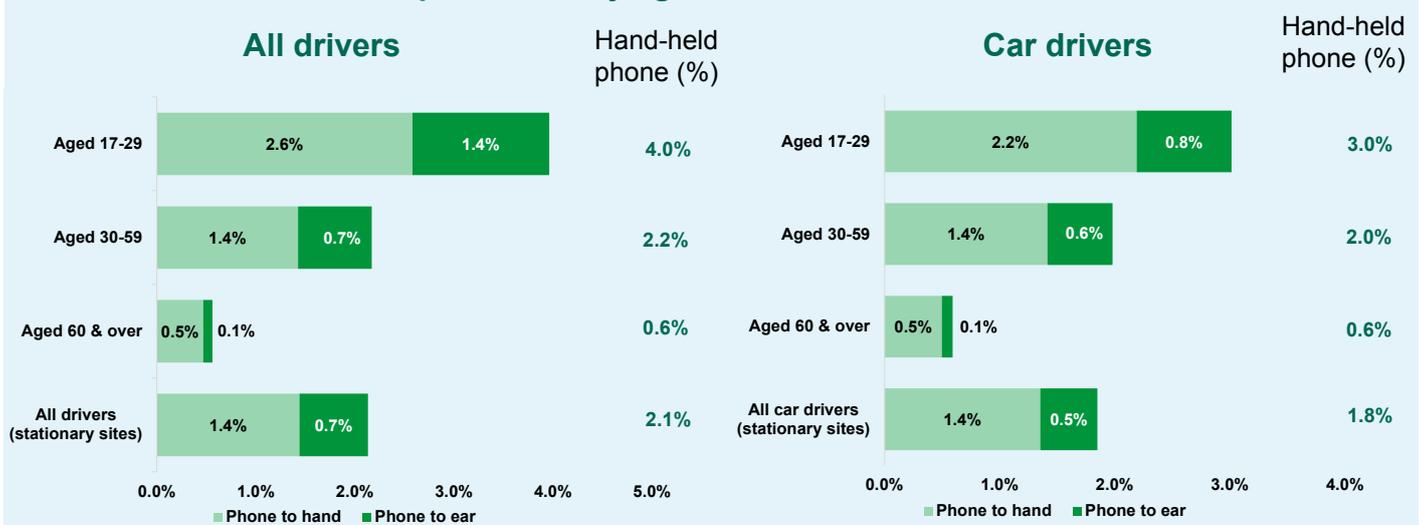


Age (stationary sites only)

Amongst all drivers and car drivers, the highest proportion of drivers observed using a mobile phone at stationary sites in Great Britain were aged 17-29. Observations on the age of the driver were only made at stationary sites because age could not be observed at moving sites.

Stationary sites were located at traffic light junctions and observed drivers behaviour whilst the vehicles were stationary. Stationary sites are not comparable with data collected at moving sites, so results in this section should not be compared to other sections.

Chart 8: Hand-held mobile phone use by age, Great Britain, 2017



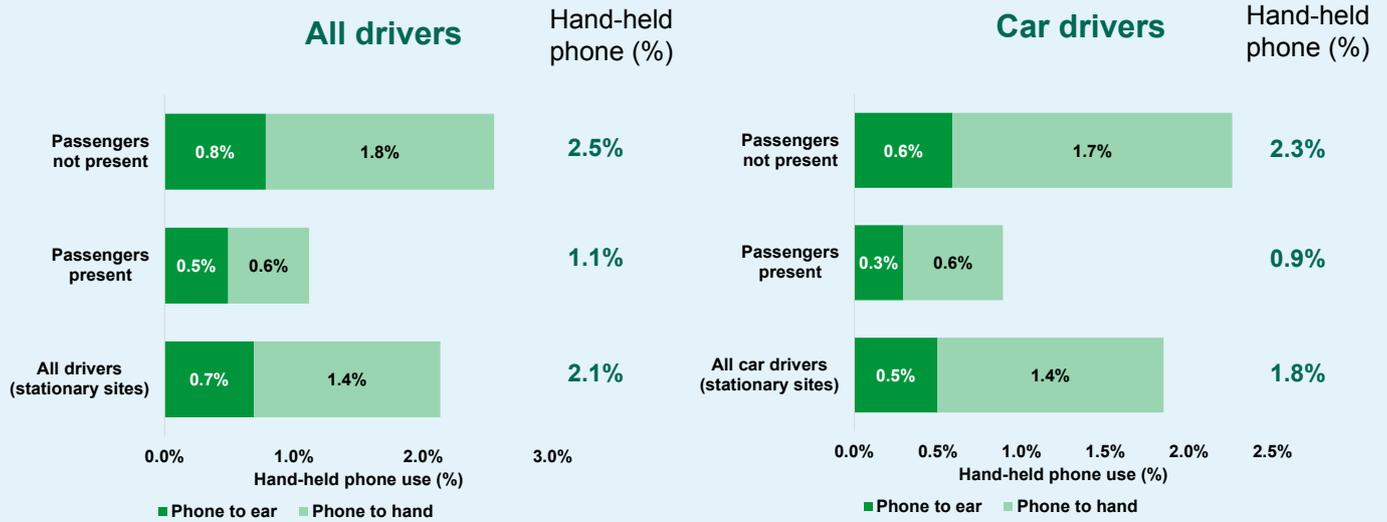
Across all age groups at stationary sites, proportions of hand-held mobile phone use are lower for female drivers in Great Britain. This is not consistent with the gender differences observed at moving sites and may reflect different gender behaviours between stationary and moving sites.

Passengers (stationary sites only)

Observations on whether passengers were present or not in the vehicle were only made at stationary sites. There was a higher proportion of drivers observed using a hand-held mobile phone when passengers were not present compared to when passengers were present in Great Britain in 2017.

Stationary sites were located at traffic light junctions and observed drivers behaviour whilst the vehicles were stationary. Stationary sites are not comparable with data collected at moving sites, so results in this section should not be compared to other sections.

Chart 9: Hand-held mobile phone use by presence of passengers, Great Britain, 2017



Seatbelt survey - headline statistics

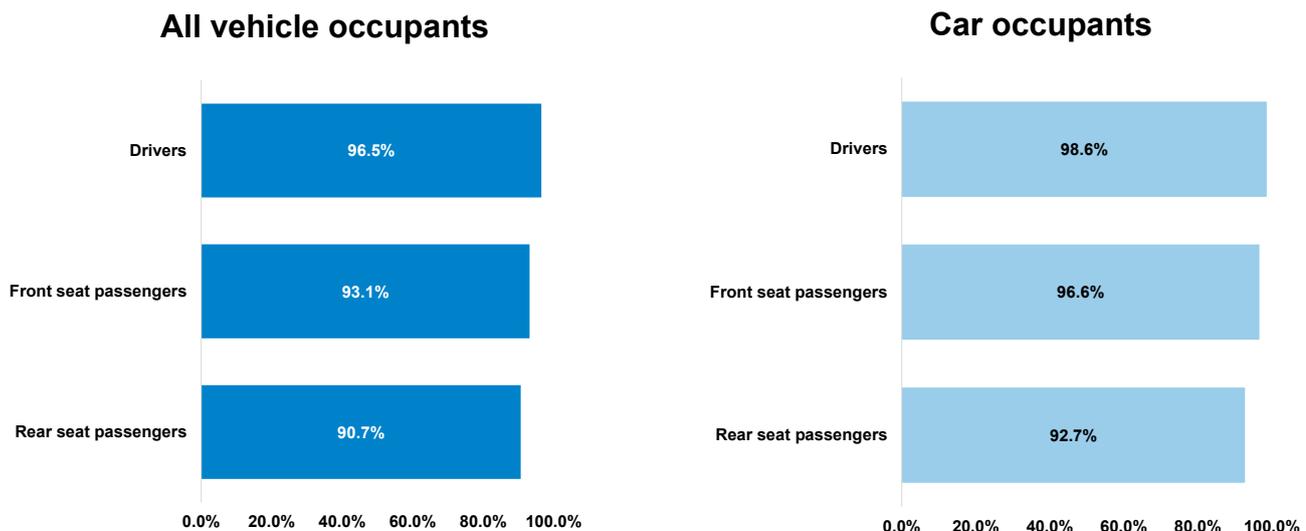
Seatbelt use observations (of drivers and passengers) were carried out at stationary traffic sites only. Unless otherwise stated results are presented for weekdays only. The results of the seatbelt survey can be used to assess compliance with the legislation in Great Britain.

In 2017, 96.5% of all **drivers** were observed using a seatbelt in Great Britain compared to 95.3% in 2014 for England and Scotland combined. This rate was lower in England and Wales (96.0%) than Scotland (97.3%) in 2017. For **front seat passengers**, 93.1% were observed wearing a seatbelt in Great Britain in 2017 compared to 90.4% in England and Wales and 98.7% in Scotland. There were 90.7% of **rear seat passengers** observed wearing a seatbelt in Great Britain in 2017. This compares to 88.3% in England and Wales and 95.1% in Scotland in 2017.

Definitions

Observers recorded the restraint being used by each vehicle occupant as: seatbelt, rear facing baby seat, child seat, booster seat, booster cushion or unrestrained. Unrestrained includes improperly used seatbelts or child restraints.

Chart 10: Seatbelt use, Great Britain, 2017



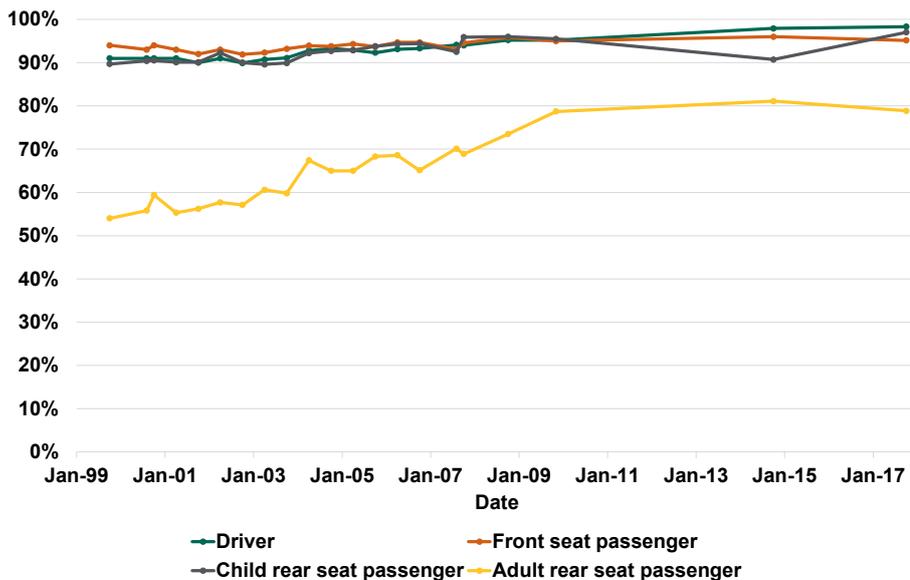
For car occupants in Great Britain in 2017, the rates were 98.6% for **drivers**, 96.6% for **front seat passengers** and 92.7% for **rear seat passengers**.

Accident data

Compared to the 27% of car occupant fatalities that were not wearing a seatbelt in Great Britain in 2017 (RAS41001), these results show that car occupants who do not wear a seatbelt are disproportionately likely to be killed in road accidents.

Since 1999, overall seatbelt use for car occupants has broadly risen. The biggest increase has been observed for adult rear seat passengers, from 54.0% in England in 1999 to 78.9% in England and Wales in 2017. Over the same time period, child rear seat passenger rates have always been higher, from 89.7% in England in 1999 to 97.0% in England and Wales in 2017. In this chart, car occupants include observations for taxi and private hire vehicles for consistency with previous surveys.

Chart 11: Overall seatbelt use for car occupants, England (1999-2014), England and Wales (2017)



Geographical coverage

Previous surveys included sites in England and Scotland only. The 2017 survey included one stationary site in Wales to make it representative of Great Britain. The 2017 figure in this chart is for England and Wales, while figures for previous years are for England only.

Includes taxi/private hire vehicles

Background on legislation

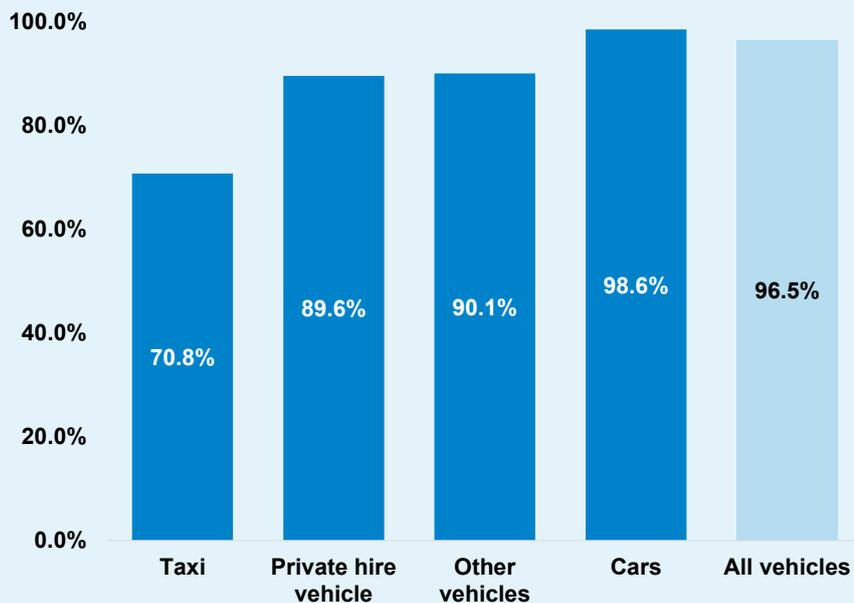
In Great Britain, the law states that, whilst travelling in cars, vans and other goods vehicles a seatbelt must be worn if one is fitted. Use of a seatbelt restraint by drivers and front seat passengers in cars was made compulsory in January 1983. Rear seatbelt use was made compulsory for cars with belts fitted for children in 1989 and adults in 1991. However, there are exceptions where a seatbelt does not need to be worn. Drivers of licenced taxis in Great Britain are exempt from wearing a seatbelt whilst seeking hire, or answering a call for hire, or carrying a passenger for hire. Drivers of private hire vehicles are also exempt from wearing a seatbelt when the vehicle is being used to carry a passenger for hire. The results of the seatbelt survey can be used to assess compliance with this legislation in Great Britain.

Further information on the law on wearing a seatbelt whilst travelling in a vehicle can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law>. Further information on cases where a seatbelt does not need to be worn can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/seat-belts-law/when-you-dont-need-to-wear-a-seat-belt>

Vehicle type

The highest rate of seatbelt use amongst drivers was observed in cars in Great Britain in 2017, and the lowest proportion was observed in taxis.

Chart 12: Driver seatbelt use by vehicle type, Great Britain, 2017



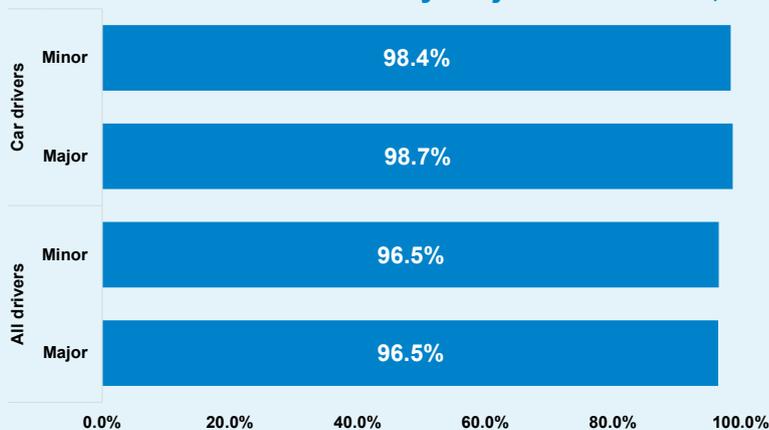
Further information on the exemptions from wearing a seatbelt for taxi and private hire vehicle drivers can be found at:

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1993/176/regulation/6/made

Road type

A slightly higher proportion of drivers were observed using seatbelts on rural roads in Great Britain than urban roads.

Chart 13: Driver seatbelt use by major/minor road, Great Britain, 2017



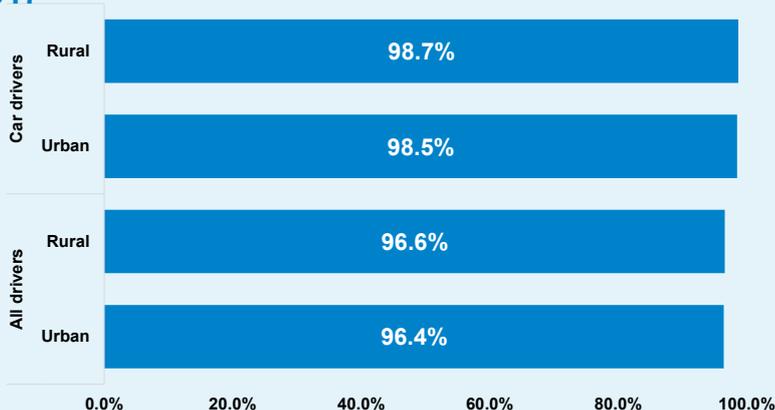
Major roads are defined as A roads

Minor roads are defined as B, C and unclassified roads.

Rural roads are defined as major and minor roads outside urban areas and having a population of less than 10 thousand.

No observations were made on motorways.

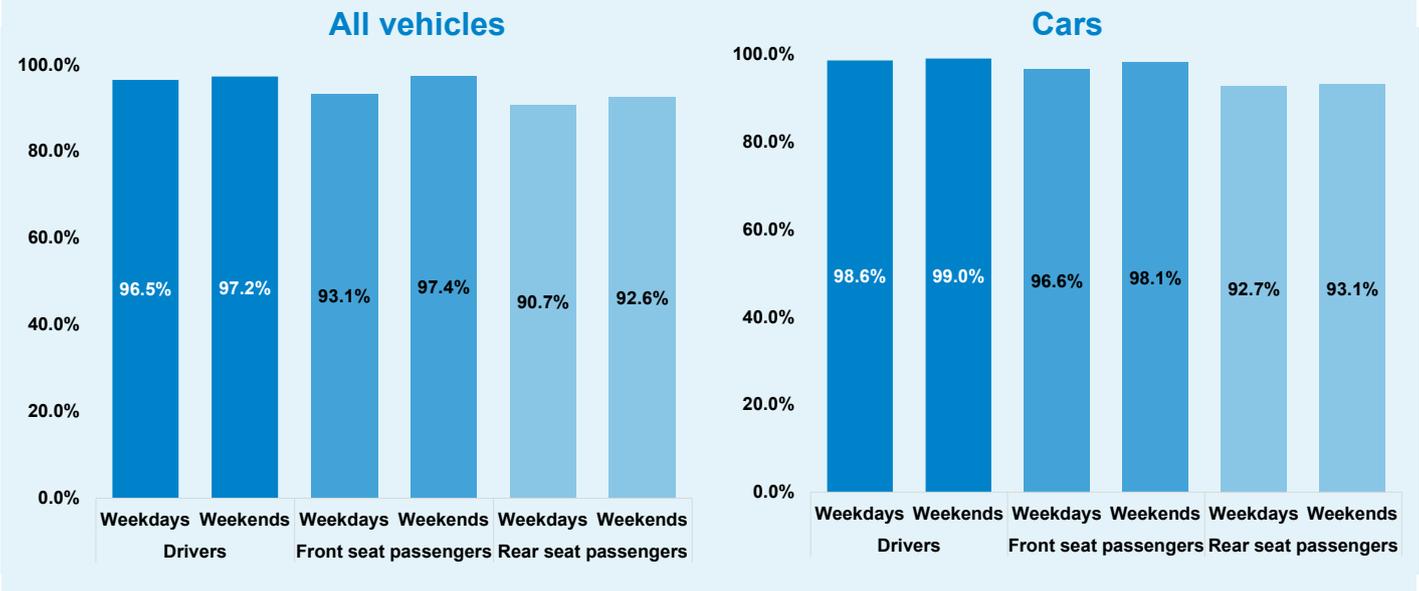
Chart 14: Driver seatbelt use by rural/urban road, Great Britain, 2017



Time of week

For drivers and passengers in Great Britain, seatbelt use was higher on weekends compared to weekdays. Headline statistics were calculated for weekdays for comparability with earlier years but some sites were observed at weekends to enable comparisons to be made.

Chart 15: Seatbelt use by weekday/weekend, Great Britain, 2017

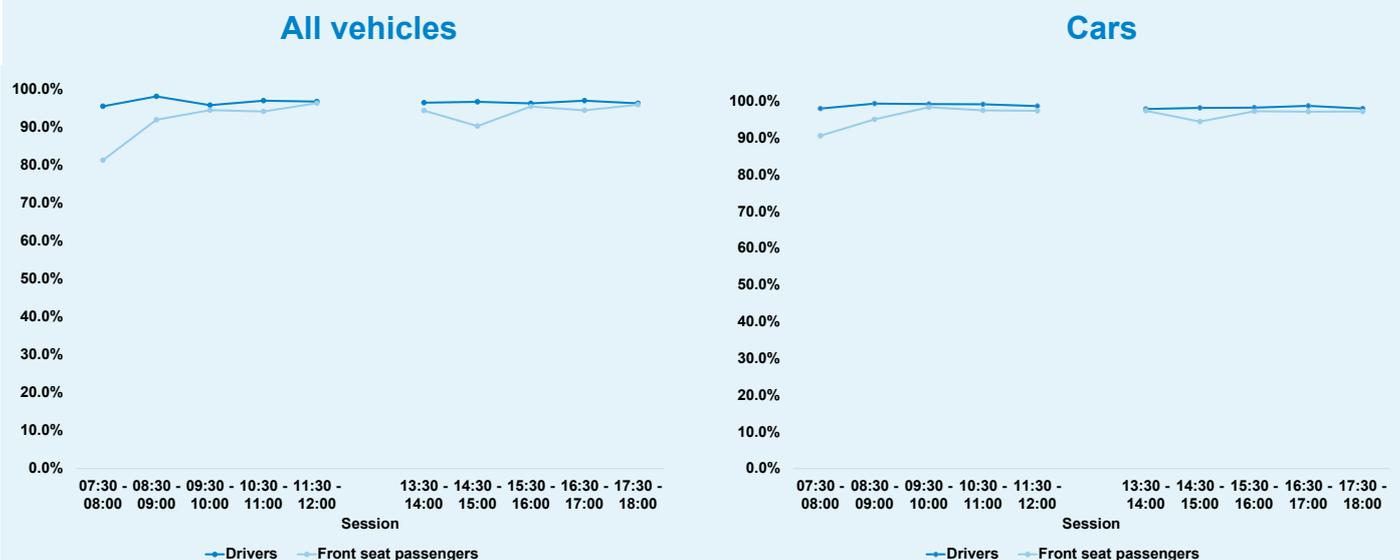


Time of day

Observations were made in half hour sessions during the survey. Results by time of day should be treated with caution as differences may be due to random variation rather than representing real changes.

The rate of seatbelt use for drivers was broadly stable by time of day in Great Britain in 2017. The proportion of front seat passengers seatbelt use was lowest between 07:30 and 08:00.

Chart 16: Seatbelt use by time of day for all vehicles, Great Britain, 2017



Age and gender

For all drivers in Great Britain, males had a lower rate of seatbelt use compared to females in 2017. Across all drivers, the rate of seatbelt use is similar for those aged 30-59 (96.1%) and aged 17-29 (96.2%) but is higher amongst those aged 60 and over (98.6%).

Chart 17: Driver seatbelt use by gender, Great Britain, 2017

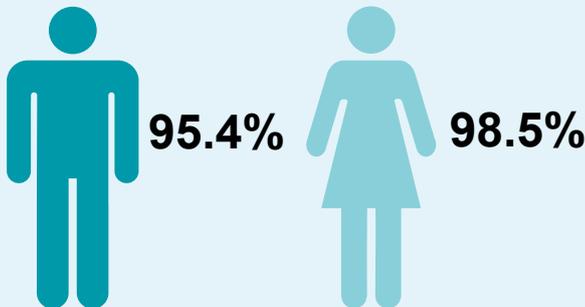
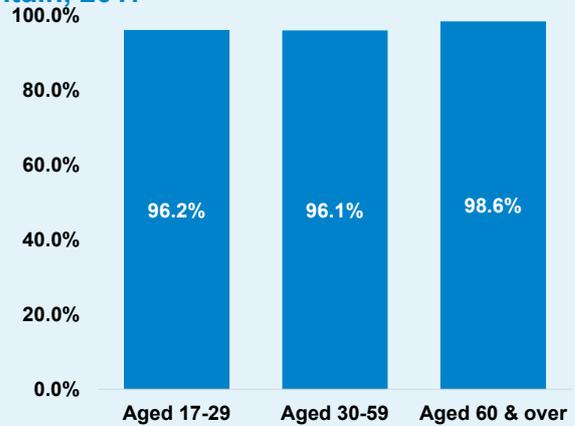


Chart 18: Driver seatbelt use by age, Great Britain, 2017



In Great Britain, females had a higher rate of seatbelt use for front seat passengers in 2017. The lowest rate of seatbelt use for front seat passengers was amongst those aged 14-29.

Chart 19: Front seat passenger seatbelt use by gender, Great Britain, 2017

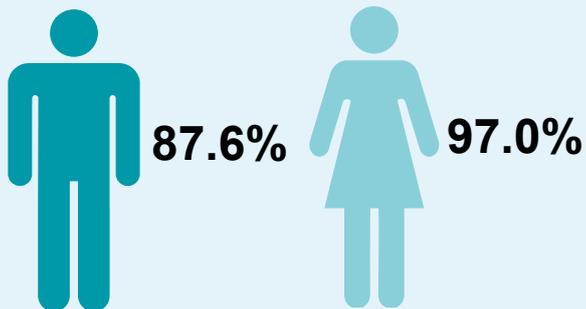
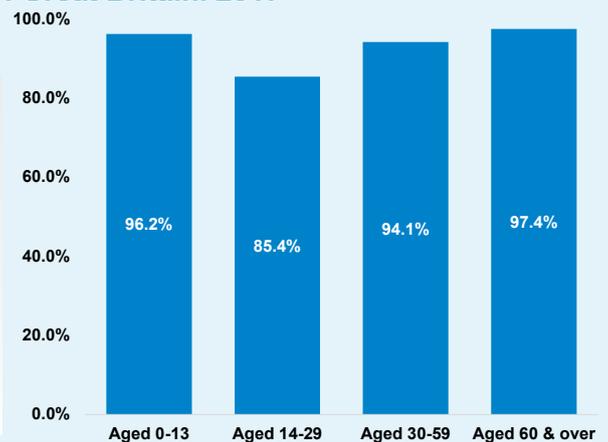


Chart 20: Front seat passenger seatbelt use by age, Great Britain, 2017



Sample sizes by age are relatively smaller for passengers so should be treated with caution

For rear seat passengers, females had higher proportions of seatbelt use compared to males in Great Britain in 2017. The lowest rates of seatbelt use were observed amongst those aged 60 and over.

Chart 21: Rear seat passenger seatbelt use by gender, Great Britain, 2017

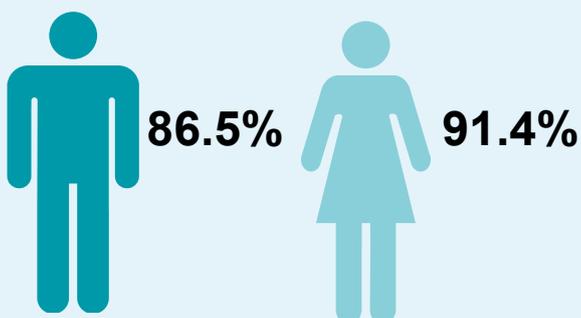
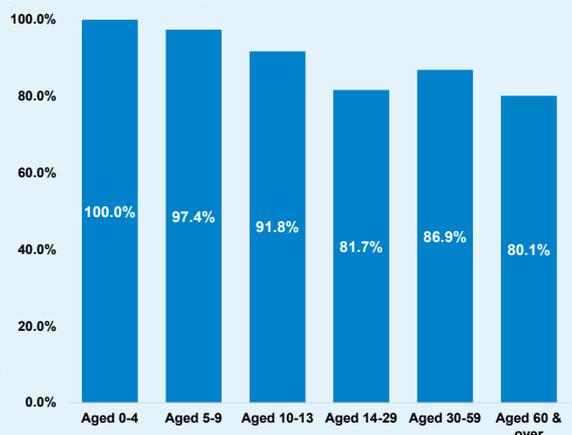


Chart 22: Rear seat passenger seatbelt use by age, Great Britain, 2017

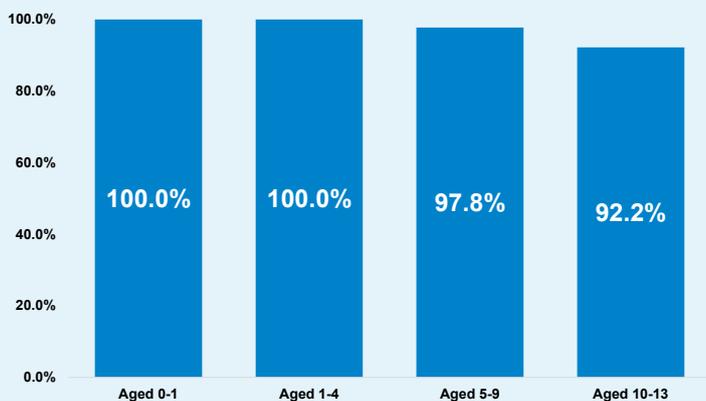


Sample sizes by age are relatively smaller for passengers so should be treated with caution

Children (aged 13 or under)

As the number of children observed is small, these results should be interpreted with caution. Differences may be due to random variation rather than representing real changes. It would have been difficult for the observers to determine the age of young children accurately, which may have meant that some children's ages were misclassified. In Great Britain, the lowest rate of seatbelt restraint use for child rear seat passengers was amongst those aged 10-13 (92.2%) in 2017.

Chart 23: Child car rear seat passenger seatbelt restraint use by age, Great Britain, 2017

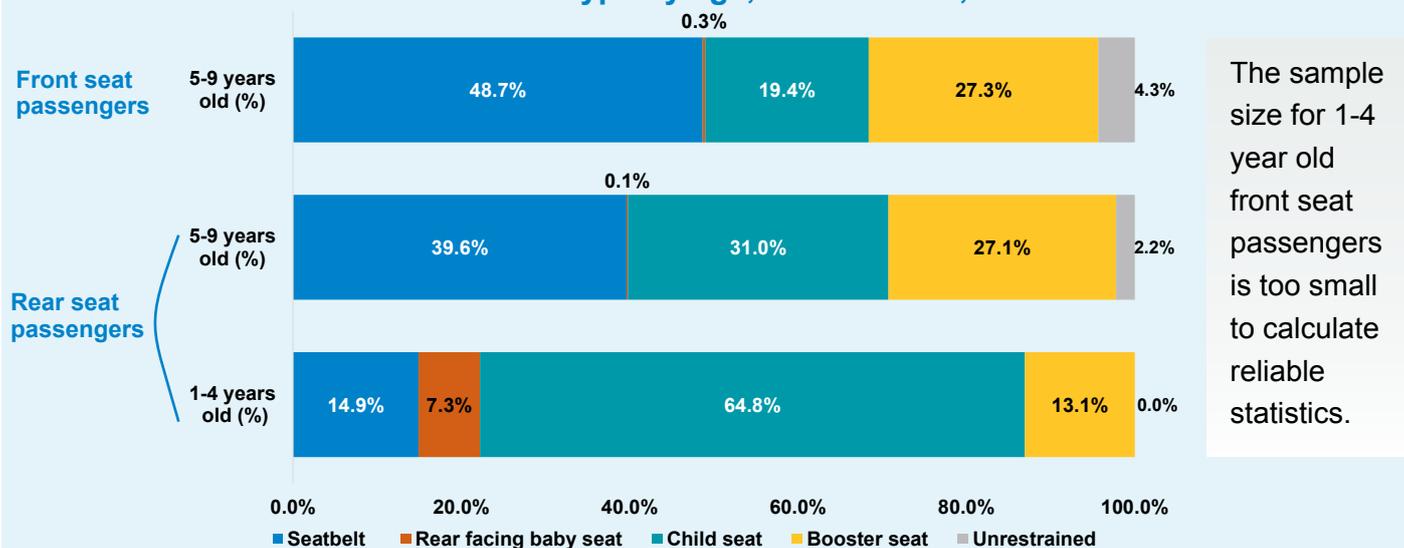


For 1-4 year old rear seat passengers in Great Britain, 64.8% were observed using a child seat in 2017, compared to 31.0% of 5-9 year old rear seat passengers.

In Great Britain, 14.9% of 1-4 year old rear seat passengers were observed using a seatbelt in 2017, compared to 39.6% of 5-9 year old rear seat passengers. For 5-9 year old front seat passengers, this rate rose to 48.7%.

In Great Britain, 13.1% of 1-4 year old rear seat passengers were observed using a booster seat compared to 27.1% of 5-9 year olds in 2017. For front seat passengers aged 5-9 years, 27.3% were observed using a booster seat in Great Britain in 2017.

Chart 24: Child car seatbelt restraint type by age, Great Britain, 2017



Background information

Site selection

Ninety observation sites were selected for this survey. These were chosen to be broadly representative of all types of road and included urban, rural, major and minor roads. No motorway sites were used as previous work has shown that it is not possible to record reliable results with high speed traffic. Sites were selected to provide a national spread and were not clustered around distinct locations, as in previous surveys. Sites were located far enough apart so that survey staff were unlikely to observe the same set of vehicle occupants. Sites located close to each other (where it might be feasible that the survey captured the same vehicle multiple times) were surveyed at different times of day.

As in previous surveys, a combination of stationary sites and moving sites were used. Moving sites were located at pavements or laybys and made observations of moving traffic. Stationary sites were located at traffic light junctions and observed driver behaviour whilst the vehicles were stationary (being held by the red light). Headline statistics were calculated for weekdays for comparability with earlier years but some sites were observed at weekends to enable comparisons to be made.

The sites selected comprised of twice as many stationary sites as moving sites, as the number of vehicle observations possible at a moving site is, on average, considerably higher than at a stationary site.

Methodology

A full methodology note for the 2017 survey can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seatbelt-and-mobile-phone-use-surveys-2017>

The note includes further detail on:

- Site selection
- Data collection method
- Data collected
- Fieldwork phase
- Data validation
- Weighting

Table 1: Number of observation sites by country and road type

| Country | Site type | Major | | Minor | | Total |
|-------------------|------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | Rural | Urban | Rural | Urban | |
| England and Wales | Moving | 5 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 21 |
| | Stationary | 6 | 14 | 6 | 13 | 39 |
| Scotland | Moving | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 10 |
| | Stationary | 5 | 6 | 2 | 7 | 20 |
| Total | | 20 | 28 | 13 | 29 | 90 |

Roadside observation methods were used to collect the data with teams of staff visiting each site. For the mobile phone survey, observations were made of drivers of cars, vans, taxis, lorries, buses, minibuses and coaches. For the seatbelt compliance survey, observations were made of all occupants of cars, vans, taxis, private hire vehicles and lorries with observations of the driver only for buses, minibuses and coaches. At moving sites, observations were made of the gender and mobile phone use of the driver, but due to the speed of the passing vehicles it was not possible to assess the age of drivers. The age of drivers and whether passengers were present were only observed at sites with stationary traffic. Details of all the variables collected at the stationary and moving sites can be found in the methodology note.

Comparability

This statistical release provides comparisons for Great Britain. The previous statistical release for 2014 published figures for England and Scotland only. Changes in the methodology and geographical coverage of the survey sites mean that figures are not directly comparable to previous years.

Weighting

The results presented in this report have been weighted using the recorded traffic count and DfT traffic flow data to provide nationally representative estimates for Great Britain, across different road and area types. The weighting procedure also enabled combined estimates of driver mobile phone use and restraint use by vehicle occupants in Great Britain to be obtained. The weighting process for Great Britain is based on the mix of road types (urban/rural and major/minor) and does not take into account the share of traffic between countries of Great Britain. This is consistent with the weighting approach used in previous surveys. More information on the weighting procedure can be found in the methodology note.

Scotland publication

Transport Scotland are publishing separate findings using the results from the surveys in Scotland, to explain trends on hand-held mobile phone use and seatbelt compliance across the country. The publication is titled *Seatbelt and Mobile Phone Usage Survey Scotland, 2017* and can be found at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publications/?publicationtype=1271>

Previous publications

Statistics on the proportion of drivers observed using mobile phones and wearing seatbelts whilst driving in England and Scotland in 2014 can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seatbelt-and-mobile-phone-use-surveys-2014>

Further information

All 2017 figures quoted in this release can be found in the associated tables on mobile phone use (MP1 to MP10) and seatbelt use (SB1 to SB12).