

Seat belt wearing rates: 2009

Survey results for England and Scotland

The Department for Transport has commissioned regular surveys of seatbelt wearing for two areas of England, centred on Nottingham and Crowthorne, since 1988. The objective of the surveys is to estimate the level of use of seatbelts and child restraints by vehicle occupants. The 2009 survey was carried out at 32 sites during October and November 2009. An additional survey was carried out in 2009 for Scotland. The following results relate to the survey sites in England, unless otherwise stated (results for Scotland are summarised on page 3). Except where otherwise stated, results relate to weekdays only.

The main results from the 2009 survey are:

- The proportion of car drivers observed wearing seat belts has not changed since the 2008 survey, remaining at 95% in 2009.
- The proportion of car front seat passengers observed wearing seat belts or child restraints has decreased slightly from 96% in 2008 to 95% in 2009.
- The proportion of car rear seat passengers observed wearing seat belts or child restraints has risen to 89% in 2009 from 88% in 2008.
- The proportion of drivers of other vehicles observed wearing seat belts has decreased from 73% in 2008 to 69% in 2009.

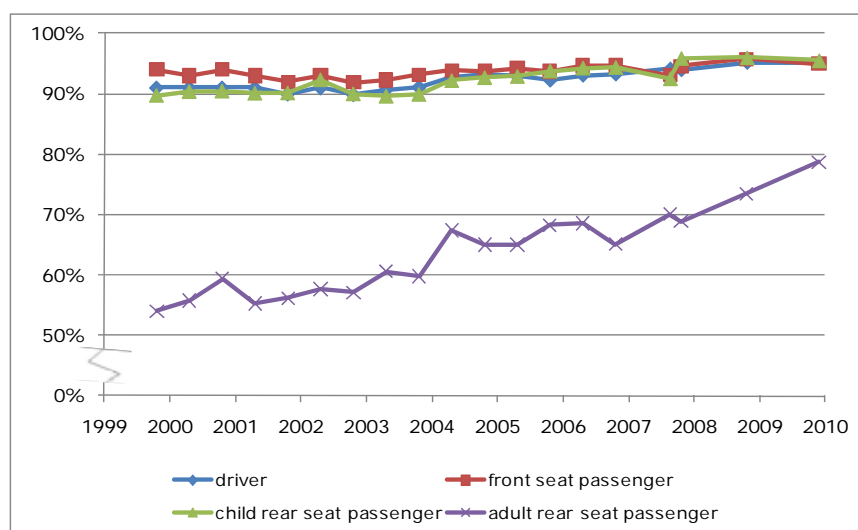
Table 1: Overall seat belt and restraint wearing rate for car and other vehicle occupants (weekdays).

	Driver		Front seat passenger		Rear seat passenger	
	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Car ¹	95%	95%	96%	95%	88%	89%
Other vehicle ²	73%	69%	61%	68%		

Trends over time

Use of a restraint by drivers and front seat passengers in cars was made compulsory in January 1983. On the rear seat, belt use was made compulsory for cars with belts fitted for children in 1989 and adults in 1991.

Figure 1: Overall seat belt and restraint wearing rate for car occupants, 1999-2009 (weekdays)



¹ Car results include taxi occupants

² Other vehicle includes vans, lorries, buses, coaches and minibuses. Driver information only is collected in buses, coaches and minibuses. Front and rear seat passengers are combined for all other vehicles as there are very few rear seat passengers in vans and lorries.

The seat belt wearing rate for car drivers and front seat passengers increased sharply from around 40% at the end of 1982 to 93% following the introduction of legislation in January 1983 making seat belt wearing compulsory for these groups.

Since 1999, the wearing rate for car drivers, front seat passengers and child rear seat passengers has risen slowly from a relatively high rate. The proportion of adult car rear seat passengers wearing restraints has increased steadily from 54% in 1999 to 79% in 2009.

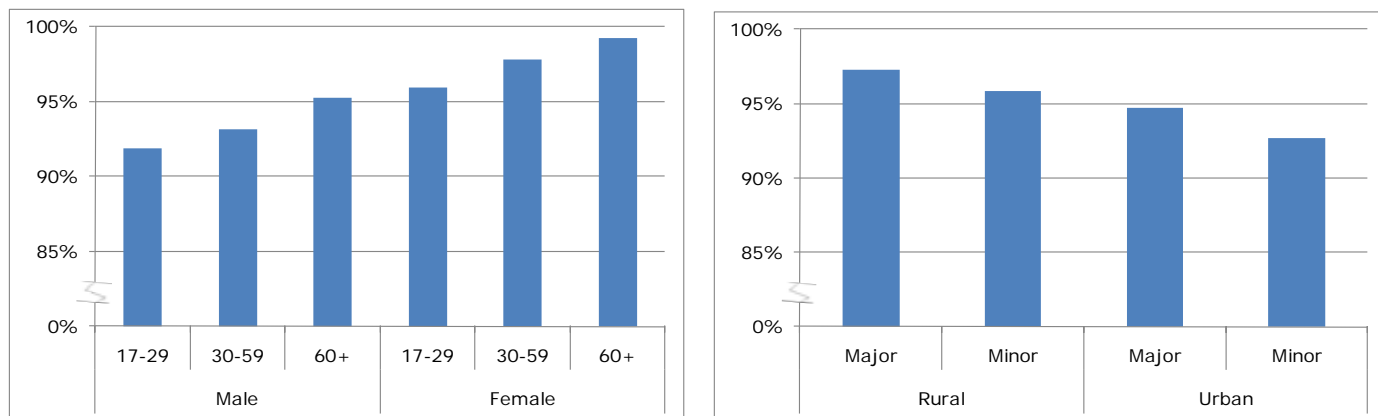
The results from the two areas identify the trends in wearing rates at consistent sites in England, however as these results are based on a survey that covers only two areas, the results are not necessarily nationally representative.

Factors associated with seat belt use

The 2009 survey showed:

- Car driver wearing rates were lower in 2009 for drivers who appeared to be younger (94%) than middle aged (95%) and older drivers (96%) [table 3/figure 2(left)].
- Male car drivers had a lower wearing rate (93%) than female car drivers (98%) [table 3].
- Car driver wearing rates were higher on major roads (96%) than minor roads (94%) in 2009 and were higher on rural roads than urban roads in 2009 [table 5/figure 2(right)].
- The proportion of car drivers wearing seat belts was slightly higher on weekends (97%) than weekdays (95%) in 2009, and this was the same as in 2008 [table 6].
- The rise in seat belt or child restraint wearing by rear seat passengers in cars [table 1] was solely due to a rise in the wearing rate of rear seat passengers aged 14 or over, which rose from 73% in 2008 to 79% in 2009 [table 3].

Figure 2: Car driver wearing rates by age and sex and road type, 2009 (weekdays)



2009 survey in Scotland: main results

The 2009 survey in Scotland showed [tables 2 and 4]:

- The proportion of car drivers wearing seat belts in 2009 was 95%, the same level seen in the previous survey for Scotland carried out in 2002.
- The proportion of young car drivers (aged 17-29) and older drivers (60+) wearing seat belts (96%) is higher than other drivers (aged 30-59) (94%).
- The proportion of passengers in cars wearing seat belts or child restraints has risen significantly in 2009 since 2002 for all age groups.

Data tables

Table 2: Overall car occupant wearing rates in England and Scotland (weekdays)

	England			Scotland		
	1999 ³ (%)	2008 ³ (%)	2009 ⁴ (%)	1997 ⁵ (%)	2002 ⁵ (%)	2009 ⁴ (%)
Driver	91	95	95 *	94	95	95
Front seat passenger	94	96	95 *	92	94	97 *
Rear seat passenger	76	88	89 *	71	71	88 *

Table 3: Detailed car occupant wearing rates in England (weekdays)

		England		
		1999 ³ (%)	2008 ³ (%)	2009 ⁴ (%)
Driver	Male	- ⁶	93	93
	Female	-	98	98
	17-29	90	96	94 *
	30-59	91	94	95 *
	60+	92	97	96
Front seat passenger	Male	-	93	92 *
	Female	-	97	97
	0-13	96	98	94 *
	14+	93	96	95
Rear seat passenger	Male	-	88	89
	Female	-	89	90
	0-4	93	98	98
	5-9	85	94	94
	10-13	82	91	90
	14+	54	73	79 *

Table 4: Detailed car occupant wearing rates in Scotland (weekdays)

		Scotland	
		2002 ⁵ (%)	2009 ⁴ (%)
Driver	Male	94	93 *
	Female	97	97 *
	17-29	94	96 *
	30-59	95	94 *
	60+	96	96
Passenger ⁷	0-4	87	97 ⁸ *
	5-13	82	97 ⁸ *
	14-29	84	93 *
	30-59	92	96 *
	60+	94	98 ⁸ *

Table 5: Car driver wearing rates in England by area and road type (weekdays)

	2008 (%)	2009 ⁴ (%)
Nottingham	96	95 *
Crowthorne	95	95
Rural	96	97 *
Urban	94	94
Major (A roads) ⁹	-	96
Minor	-	94

Table 6: Car driver wearing rates in England, weekdays and weekends

	2008 (%)	2009 ⁴ (%)
Weekday	95	95
Weekend	96	97 *

Based on sites where a weekend survey took place, therefore not directly comparable with other tables.

³ 1999 results from TRL (2000), 2008 results from TRL (2008)

⁴ * represents 2009 results that are statistically significantly different (p<0.05) to 2008 (2002 for Scotland) results

⁵ Results from Burns et al (2002)

⁶ - represents results that are not available

⁷ Age groups are different to England in order to be comparable to 2002 results. Front and rear seat passengers are combined in order to be comparable with previous years' results

⁸ Based on fewer than 10 unrestrained passengers

⁹ Major roads are defined as A roads, minor roads include B, C and unclassified roads

Survey method

The use of seatbelts by vehicle occupants was observed at 32 sites in two areas centred on Crowthorne and Nottingham, and at 21 sites in Scotland. Surveys take place during daylight hours (08:30 – 18:00) during the week and eight sites are revisited at the weekend in the Nottingham and Crowthorne survey. In 2009 these sites were adjusted to make them more representative of different road types across England and Scotland. Detailed observations of vehicle occupants are made at these sites, located at light controlled junctions on a mixture of road types and locations.

Two survey staff are located at each site: the first records detailed observations about vehicle occupants including age, sex and restraint use for as many vehicles as possible in each red traffic light phase; the second records the number of vehicles passing through the survey site.

The count allows the proportion of vehicles observed to be calculated. This is used to weight the data. In addition the results are adjusted to represent the national distribution of traffic flow on different road types. In 2009, occupants in 14,601 cars and 3,355 other vehicles were observed in the weekday core survey for England. This included 3,744 front seat and 1,452 rear seat passengers in cars and 624 passengers in other vehicles. For the additional survey in Scotland, occupants in 9,053 cars (including 2,334 front and 575 rear seat passengers) were observed at 21 sites.

Survey definitions

Restraint type: seat belt, rear facing baby seat, child seat, booster seat, booster cushion, unrestrained. Restraints that are being used incorrectly are also recorded, and these are classified as unrestrained.

An **incorrectly used restraint** is one that is not fastened correctly. This includes a seatbelt wrapped around the waist and fastened, seatbelt worn but not fastened, child car seats incorrectly fitted or integral harnesses not fastened correctly. A correctly used harness includes children who are using a restraint correctly but the restraint is clearly incorrect for their age.

Use of seat belt and other restraints can be difficult to see, for example in certain weather and light conditions or on vehicle occupants wearing dark clothes. In these cases the observer will record unknown restraint use. These cases are excluded from the above results.

Further information and references

Further information on the 2009 survey can be found in the forthcoming report 'Seat belt and mobile phone usage surveys: England and Scotland 2009' which will be available from the Department for Transport website from March 2010.

More detailed information on previous surveys can be found in the following reports:

Burns A, Kummerer M and Macdonald NC (2002). *Seat belt wearing in Scotland: A second study on compliance*. Scottish Executive Social Research report, Stationary Office, Edinburgh.

TRL (2000). *Restraint use by car occupants, 1998-2000*. Leaflet LF 2083, Wokingham.

TRL (2008). *Restraint use by car occupants, 2006-2008*. Leaflet LF 2106, Wokingham.