

DRIVER DISTRACTION

What are the risks?

Taking your eyes off the road while driving for two seconds or more doubles your risk of crashing¹. If your eyes are off the road for two seconds while travelling at 50km/h, you're driving blind for 27 metres – just a bit longer than the length of a swimming pool.

A driver or pedestrian can be distracted by many things, including:

- Eating, drinking or smoking
- Adjusting the radio, music or navigation
- Using a mobile phone or other device
- Passengers in the car.

Using a mobile phone while driving is especially dangerous as it involves three types of distraction:

- Physical distraction – hand is moved away from the steering wheel and vehicle controls
- Visual distraction – eyes are not looking at the road environment
- Cognitive distraction – driver's attention, focus and concentration is divided between the driving task and the phone.

Research² shows using a mobile phone while driving is associated with:

- Missing traffic signs and signals
- A reduction in the ability to maintain position within the lane
- Riskier speed selection, acceleration and deceleration, making for more variations in travelling speed
- A reduction in maintaining safe following distance and judging gaps in traffic
- Less control, and more sudden and hard braking
- Slower reaction time to events, especially those in the periphery
- Reduced awareness of traffic and road environment.

Young and inexperienced drivers are less able to focus on multiple things at the same time as their driving is less automated, uses more attentional resources and is more prone to error than that of experienced drivers³. As such, risks associated with mobile phone use while driving are higher for young drivers than more experienced drivers⁴.

Pedestrians can also be distracted by mobile devices or when listening to music. Research⁵ shows that distracted pedestrians:

- Are less likely to look both ways before crossing the road
- Take 18% longer to cross the road
- Change direction more often
- Are less likely to be aware of other pedestrians.

What works?

- Turning the phone off, using 'Road Mode', or putting the phone in the boot where it is out of reach and earshot
- Vehicle technologies such as 'Lane Keep Assist', Auto Emergency Braking (AEB) and blind spot monitoring systems can help when the driver's attention is elsewhere
- New technology has the potential to disable the use of mobile phones while driving, especially in complex situations.

The law

It is illegal in all Australian states and territories to use a hand-held mobile phone while driving. This includes:

- Talking
- Texting
- Playing games
- Taking photos or videos
- Using any other function on your phone.

Using a hand-held mobile phone is also illegal when your vehicle is stationary (i.e. still) but not parked, such as when you're stopped at traffic lights. Drivers who break this law in Victoria face an on-the-spot fine of \$496 and will incur four demerit points. Learner, P1 and P2 drivers are not permitted to use either hand-held or hands-free mobile phones while driving.

¹ Klauer, S.G., Dingus, T.A., Neale, V. L., Sudweeks, J.D. & Ramsey, D.J. (2006). *The Impact of Driver Inattention on Near Crash/Crash Risk: An Analysis Using the 100-Car Naturalistic Driving Study Data*. Report No. DOT HS 810594. Washington DC.

² Gauld, C., Lewis, I., Haque, M. & Washington, S. (2015). Effect of mobile phone use and aggression on speed selection by young drivers: A driving simulator study. *Journal of the Australasian College of Road Safety*, 26, 40-46.

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³ Senserrick, T. M., & Mitsopoulos-Rubens, E. (2013). Behavioural Adaptation and Novice Drivers. In C. M. Rudin-Brown, & S. Jamson, *Behavioural Adaptation and Road Safety: Theory, Evidence and Action* (pp. 245-263). Taylor and Francis.

⁴ Klauer, S.G., Gou, F., Simons-Mortons, B., Ouimet, M.C., Lee, S.E. & Dingus, T. A. (2014). Distracted driving and risk of road crashes among novice and experienced drivers. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 370, 54-59.

⁵ Thompson, L.L., Rivara, F.P., Ayyagari, R.C. & Ebel, B., E. (2013). Impact of social and technological distraction on pedestrian crossing behaviour: an observational study. *Injury Prevention*, 19, 232-237.

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