

# Speeding - Did you know?



Transport  
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FACT SHEET 5 of 6

## How widespread a problem is speeding?

### 1. Are most motorists aware of the risks and dangers of speeding?

Yes. There is a strong understanding from drivers that speeding increases your risk of a crash. Nevertheless, research conducted by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) in 2009 found that although speed is the reason most commonly mentioned by New South Wales (NSW) drivers as the key factor leading to road crashes, speeding is still socially acceptable. Only six per cent of drivers reported that they had never exceeded the speed limit, with almost a quarter (24 per cent) speeding all or most of the time (Walker et al) <sup>1</sup>.

In addition, the 2009 national survey of 'Community Attitudes to Road Safety' showed that 92 per cent of Australian drivers believe that a crash will be more severe if travelling at 70 km/h rather than 60 km/h (Petroulias) <sup>2</sup>.

### 2. Do they slow down accordingly?

Not necessarily. The strong driver awareness that speeding is the key factor causing crashes contrasts dramatically with the amount that drivers actually speed.

The NSW Centre for Road Safety conducts annual speed surveys for all speed limit zones. These speed surveys show that around 40 to 50 per cent of vehicles are speeding in most speed zones, and that around 75 to 80 per cent of speeding vehicles were travelling more than 10 km/h over the speed limit.

### 3. Are NSW drivers more speed limit compliant than in other Australian states and countries?

The speed survey results highlighted above show that a large proportion of drivers exceed the speed limit, however, most do so by a relatively small margin. New South Wales drivers also report high levels of speeding. A large scale telephone survey of NSW drivers commissioned by the RTA in 2009 to better understand the beliefs and attitudes toward speeding found that self-reported speeding behaviour in NSW is similar to the rest of Australia and most other countries (Walker et al) <sup>3</sup>. RTA attitudinal research shows that only a small proportion (six per cent) of drivers report they 'never' speed.

These findings are consistent with previous Australian research in 2006 that found 24 per cent of NSW respondents reported that they were likely to speed 'under typical conditions (Hatfield and Job) <sup>4</sup>.

### 4. So, if drivers are aware of the dangers - why do they continue to speed?

One likely explanation of the mismatch between accepting that speeding increases crash risk and their continuing to speed is - driver overconfidence. Many studies internationally (Svenson et al) <sup>5,6</sup> and in NSW (Fernandes et al) <sup>7,8</sup> show that drivers are overly optimistic about their driving ability. Drivers tend to see themselves as superior to the 'average' driver, with very few drivers rating themselves as 'below average'. As a consequence, while drivers acknowledge the risk of speeding, they believe it doesn't apply to them due to their superior driving skills.

### 5. To what degree do drivers find low level speeding more acceptable than high level speeding?

In the 2009 RTA survey of NSW drivers, low level speeding was seen as acceptable by a large number of participants. Low level speeding was seen as most acceptable by the public in 100 km/h speed zones. This research concluded that, while the community accepts that high level speeding (ie, more than 30 km/h over the speed limit) is dangerous, there is more acceptance of low level speeding.

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## 6. Isn't high level speeding more of a problem?

Not necessarily. Any occurrence of high level speeding places that driver and other road users or passengers at great danger. Low level speeding, however, is an extremely dangerous community wide issue due to the large number of drivers who speed by a small margin all of the time.

A study by Kloeden <sup>9</sup> of 151 cases in Adelaide found that exceeding the speed limit in urban areas doubles the likelihood of a casualty crash and each additional increase in speed by five km/h further doubles the risk. Low level speeding is such a large issue because the cumulative effect of the additional risk associated with low level speeding multiplied by a high number of drivers speeding at the lower levels, results in more casualty crashes than high level speeding (Gavin et al) <sup>10</sup>.

## 7. Despite all the warnings, why is low level speeding still a widespread and accepted behaviour?

Low level speeding remains a widespread issue which is viewed by many drivers as acceptable. This occurs despite all the warnings, mainly because most drivers and riders do not personalise the risk of low level speeding, as they rarely experience or observe crashes and feel they can predict where enforcement takes place.

Yet, as the above findings show, collectively, this large amount of low level speeding is leading to a considerable amount of trauma on NSW roads.

## 8. More information/contact details

For more information on speed zones and to 'Have Your Say' on speed limits and speed limit signs, visit the RTA's new Safer Roads NSW website at [www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au).

## References:

- <sup>1</sup> Walker, E, Murdoch, C, Bryant, P, Barnes, B & Johnson, B (2009). Quantitative study of attitudes, motivations and beliefs related to speeding and speed enforcement. Proceedings of the Australasian Road Safety Research Policing Education Conference, Sydney, 2009.
- <sup>2</sup> Petroulias, T (2009). Community attitudes to road safety – 2009 survey report. Road Safety Report No. 4. Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Canberra.
- <sup>3</sup> Walker, E, Murdoch, C, Bryant, P, Barnes, B & Johnson, B (2009). Quantitative study of attitudes, motivations and beliefs related to speeding and speed enforcement. Proceedings of the Australasian Road Safety Research Policing Education Conference, Sydney, 2009.
- <sup>4</sup> Hatfield, J. & Job, RFS (2006). Beliefs and attitudes about speeding and its countermeasures. Report to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, Report No: B2001/0342.
- <sup>5</sup> Svenson, O, Fischhoff B & MacGregor, D (1985). Perceived driving safety and seatbelt usage. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 17(2), 119-133.
- <sup>6</sup> Weinstein, ND & Lyon, JE (1999). Mindset, optimism bias about personal risk and health-protective behaviour. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 4, 289-300.
- <sup>7</sup> Fernandes, R, Hatfield, J & Job, RFS (2010). A systematic investigation of the differential predictors of risky driving behaviours among young drivers. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 13, 179-196.
- <sup>8</sup> Job, RFS, Hamer, V & Walker, M (1995). The effects of optimism bias and fear on protective behaviour. In: Kenny, D, Job, RFS (Eds.), *Australia's Adolescents: A Health Psychology Perspective*. New England University Press, Armidale, pp. 151–156.
- <sup>9</sup> Kloeden CN, McLean AJ, Moore VM, and Ponte G (1997) Travelling Speed and the Risk of Crash Involvement, NHMRC Road Accident Research Unit, The University of Adelaide
- <sup>10</sup> Gavin, A, Walker, E, Murdoch, C, Graham, A, Fernandes, R, Job, RFS (2010). Is a focus on low level speeding justified? Objective determination of the relative contributions of low and high level speeding to the road toll. Proceedings of the Australasian Road Safety Research Policing Education Conference, Canberra, 2010.