

Speeding - Did you know?



Transport
Roads & Traffic
Authority

FACT SHEET 1 of 6

Why is speeding a problem?

1. What is speeding?

If you drive above the maximum speed limit or you drive too fast for the weather, road and/or traffic conditions, even if the posted speed limit is not exceeded – you are speeding! Speeding is one of the most commonly reported factors associated with crashes, yet, few drivers view speeding as an immediate risk to their personal safety.

2. I'm a good driver, so I can speed safely. Can't I?

No. There's no such thing as speeding safely. Speed alone, regardless of any other factors, including how good a car you may be driving or how good a driver you may be, increases both the likelihood and the severity of a crash. Think about it. Any crash with a speeding vehicle could involve you, your passengers, pedestrians and/or the driver and passengers of one or more other vehicles.

3. The faster you drive - the greater your risk of a crash and severe injury.

As your speed increases, so does the distance travelled while processing and reacting to a hazard. At the same time, the distance needed for you to stop also increases - at a considerable rate.

Speeding also contributes to the increased risk of losing vehicle control. At higher speeds, cars become more difficult to manoeuvre - especially on corners or curves or where evasive action is necessary. The forces experienced by the human body in a collision also increase as the speed increases. Driving within the speed limit:

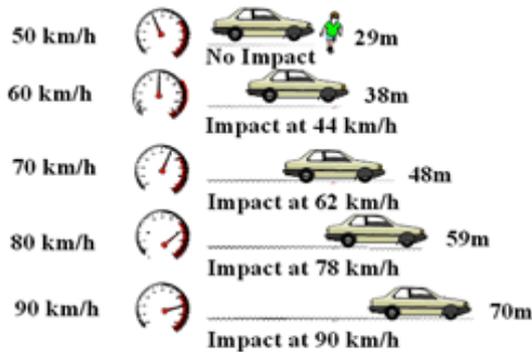
- Allows road users more time to assess hazards and avoid potential crashes.
- Reduces the distance travelled while reacting to hazards.
- Provides a greater opportunity to avoid a collision.
- Makes it less likely that either you or another driver/rider will lose control.
- Reduces the impact forces in the event of a crash, making severe outcomes less likely.

4. The faster you drive - the harder you hit another vehicle, pedestrian or other object in a crash.

Even exceeding the speed limit by a small margin can have a considerable impact. Consider this example: A driver notices a pedestrian crossing the road. If the car is travelling at 50 km/h and the driver brakes when the pedestrian is 29 meters away, there will be enough space in which to stop without hitting the pedestrian. Increase the vehicle speed by just 10 km/h and the situation changes dramatically. At 60 km/h, with the pedestrian 29 meters away and the driver braking at the same point, the car will be travelling at 44 km/h when it hits the pedestrian.

The following diagram illustrates the stopping distances and impact forces at various speeds:

Speed, Stopping Distance and Impact Speed



5. I don't speed very often or by much, so, speeding doesn't really matter to me. Does it?

It only takes one driving error, at one moment in time to cause a casualty crash. While high level speeding places that driver and other road users or passengers at great danger, low level speeding is a dangerous community wide issue due to the large number of drivers who speed by a small margin.

Exceeding the speed limit by even a small amount increases the risk of a crash. A study by Kloeden of 151 cases in Adelaide found that each additional increase in speed by 5 km/h doubles the riskⁱ of a casualty crash. 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 these low levels, results in more casualty crashes than high level speeding (Gavin et al)ⁱⁱ.

6. If I think the speed limit is too low, why should I stick to the limit?

Speed limits are set by road safety experts in accordance with the NSW Speed Zoning Guidelines. Speed limits accurately reflect the safety factors affecting given lengths of road. The factors determining the speed limit may not be immediately apparent to road users who may not appreciate the level of risk associated with speed relative to a particular road.

If you have concerns with the speed limit on a particular road, you can notify us via the Safer Roads NSW website at www.rta.nsw.gov.au.

7. I can save time by driving fast?

Little time is saved by speeding, but if everyone is travelling at a similar speed it will make travel conditions more harmonious and free flowing. It is much easier and safer to judge gaps and there will be fewer disruptions due to crashes.

You save only a maximum of 46 seconds over a 10 kilometre distance if you travel at 65 km/h instead of 60 km/h, however, it doubles the risk of being involved in a casualty crash. In fact delays are more likely to be associated with other traffic, traffic controls such as roundabouts and traffic lights and road geometry such as curves and grades. So, you only save the full 46 seconds in the rare circumstance of a relatively straight road, with no impeding traffic and no signals, stop signs, give ways or roundabouts.

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8. But not all crashes are speed related, so, why are we told speeding is such a big problem?

While speeding is not the primary cause of all crashes, higher speeds increase the likelihood of a crash occurring and make the outcome of any crash far more severe. Managing speed will reduce the severity and frequency of all crashes regardless of factors contributing to the crash in the first instance – that is why controlling vehicle speeds is so important to road safety.

Speed is the major cause of many crashes, so, while we don't expect that reducing the speed limit will remove all crashes, reducing speed will certainly reduce both the risk and severity of crashes.

9. 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.

References:

i 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.

ii 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.

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