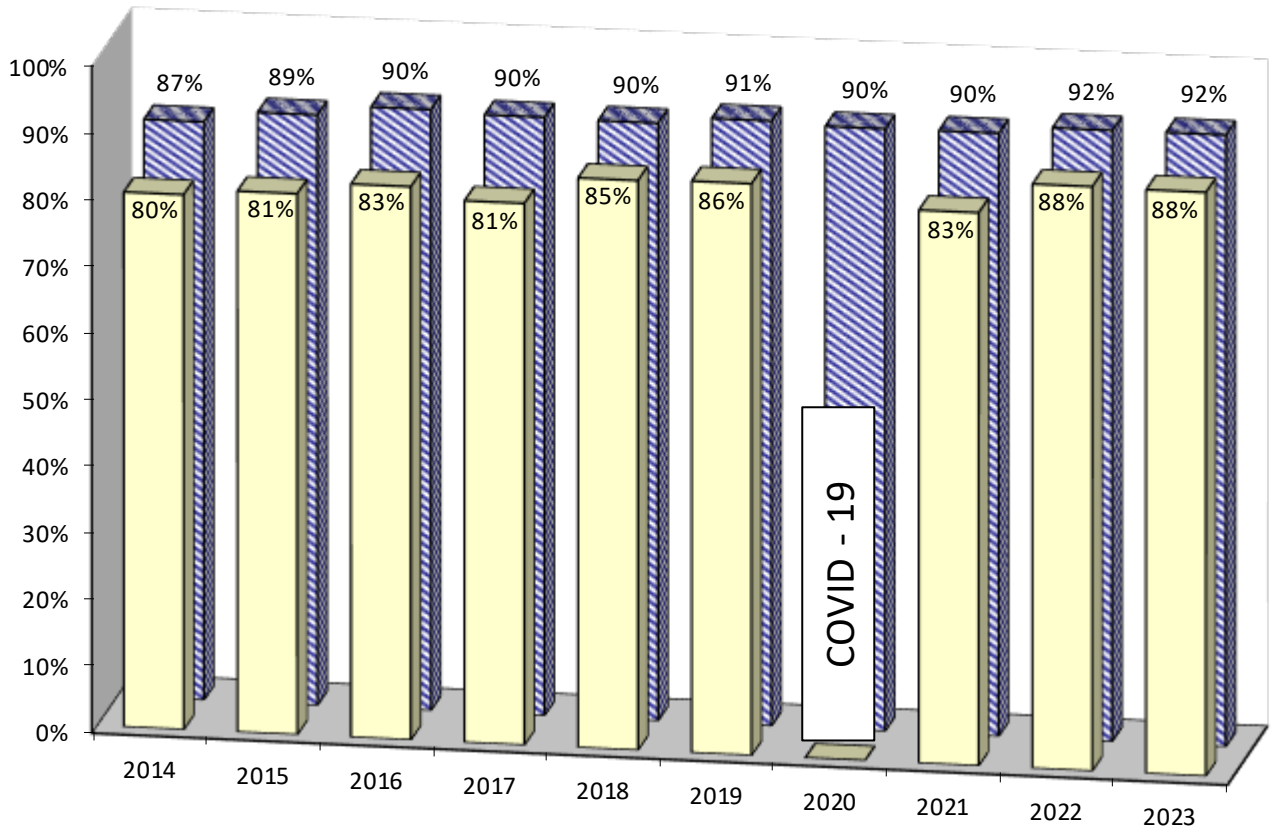
Safety Restraint Usage

Idaho's seat belt use law, effective July 1, 1986, requires seat belt use for front seat passengers and drivers, regardless of residency, in vehicles with a gross vehicle weight of 8,000 pounds or less that were manufactured with safety belts. The law is a "secondary" law and can only be enforced when someone is stopped for another traffic violation. The law was updated July 1, 2003. It now covers all seating positions and has enhanced penalties for drivers less than 18 years of age. Drivers and occupants, 18 years of age and older, receive separate tickets.

Figure 13 depicts observed seat belt use by year for both Idaho and the U.S. The figures are the observed rates for persons in passenger cars, pickups, sport utility vehicles, and vans, which made up 92% of the vehicles involved in motor vehicle crashes in 2023. The U.S. usage rate comes from the National Occupant Protection Use Survey (NOPUS) and the mini NOPUS, which are done alternately every year.

Figure 13
Observed Seat Belt Usage – Idaho vs. U.S.: 2014 - 2023



No observational seat belt survey was done in 2020 because of the pandemic. The methodology for national seat belt surveys differs from that of Idaho.

Observational Seat Belt Survey Results

Table 27 shows the observed shoulder harness seat belt use by county. The sample for the observational seat belt survey is required to be updated every 5 years. The revisions have been implemented in 2013, 2018 and in 2023. A new set of counties and observation sites are selected for the sample. There was no survey done in 2020 because of COVID-19.

Table 27
Observed Seat Belt Use by County: 2019-2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2022-2023	Avg. Change 2019-2022
Ada	95.1%	////	89.4%	97.4%	97.8%	0.4%	1.5%
Bannock	85.4%	////	83.3%	76.0%	80.0%	5.3%	-5.6%
Bingham	----	----	----	----	79.6%	----	----
Bonner	83.1%	////	82.5%	89.2%	80.4%	-9.9%	3.7%
Bonneville	75.5%	////	81.3%	79.1%	81.2%	2.6%	2.5%
Canyon	81.3%	////	78.0%	80.3%	88.2%	9.9%	-0.6%
Cassia	68.7%	////	60.3%	75.0%	74.4%	-0.8%	6.1%
Elmore	91.7%	////	88.2%	93.6%	94.4%	0.8%	1.2%
Franklin	82.3%	////	66.2%	70.7%	----	----	-6.3%
Fremont	82.0%	////	73.4%	77.8%	67.0%	-13.8%	-2.3%
Jerome	70.4%	////	73.8%	81.6%	72.7%	-11.0%	7.7%
Kootenai	89.1%	////	85.4%	88.0%	91.2%	3.6%	-0.5%
Latah	82.2%	////	86.9%	87.8%	88.2%	0.5%	3.4%
Nez Perce	85.6%	////	91.9%	82.9%	91.5%	10.3%	-1.2%
Payette	----	----	----	----	87.8%	----	----
Twin Falls	77.8%	////	73.7%	74.9%	80.7%	7.7%	-1.9%
Washington	79.6%	////	78.4%	74.3%	----	----	-3.3%
Statewide	**85.7%**	**////**	**82.9%**	**87.6%**	**87.5%**	**-0.1%**	**1.2%**

The Office of Highway Safety evaluates compliance rates through analysis of crash data and statewide observational surveys of seat belt use. Observational surveys are conducted by observing shoulder harness use or non-use. The observational survey is a representative sample of the state and does not include all counties.

Table 28 shows the observed seat belt use for the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) districts[4] by vehicle type for 2023. A map of the transportation districts can be found in Appendix A. District 3 (south-west Idaho) had the highest overall usage at 91.9%, while district 4 (south-central Idaho) had the overall lowest usage at 78.6%.

Table 28
Idaho Safety Belt Observation Survey: 2023 – Usage by Vehicle Type

ITD District	Passenger Cars, Vans, and Sport Utility Vehicles	Pickup Trucks	All Vehicles
1	93.4%	85.3%	91.0%
2	91.7%	88.4%	90.3%
3	93.9%	87.0%	91.9%
4	81.3%	73.8%	78.6%
5	86.0%	64.0%	79.9%
6	84.4%	69.9%	80.8%
Statewide	**90.1%**	**80.9%**	**87.5%**

Usage rates for the occupants of pickup trucks continue to be lower than usage rates for other types of passenger vehicles. The usage rate for pickup truck occupants in 2021 ranged from a high of 87.0% in District 3 (south-west Idaho) to a low of 64.0% in District 5 (south-east Idaho).

Self-Reported Seat Belt Usage Results

Table 29 shows the self-reported seat belt use for people, ages 7 and older, in passenger cars, pickups, sport utility vehicles, and vans that were killed or seriously injured. The child passenger safety seat law was upgraded in 2005 to include children age 6 and younger. Research has indicated there is a tendency for persons involved in crashes to falsely report compliance with the seat belt law and thus, self-reported use tends to overstate actual use[5]. Seat belt use by severely or fatally injured occupants can be more directly assessed by law enforcement officers or emergency medical personnel, and is therefore, more reliable.

Table 29
Self-Reported Seat Belt Use: 2019-2023
Age 7 and Older in Passenger Cars, Pickups, Sport Utility Vehicles, and Vans

Injury Type	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2022-2023	Avg. Change 2019-2022
Fatalities -Restraints Used	43.6%	34.8%	36.4%	33.8%	42.1%	24.6%	-7.6%
Suspected Serious Injuries - Restraints Used	67.6%	57.7%	55.7%	57.7%	61.1%	5.9%	-4.8%

Of the 178 passenger motor vehicle occupants over the age of 7 killed in 2023, only 75 were using seat belts. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates seat belts are 50% effective in preventing fatalities and serious injuries. By this estimate, there were 75 lives saved in 2023 by seat belt usage and an additional 43 lives (half of those killed and unbelted) could have been saved if everyone had buckled up.

Costs of Injuries by Safety Restraint Use

Table 30
2023 Costs of Injuries
Persons Using Safety Restraints versus Persons Not Using Safety Restraints
Age 7 & Older in Passenger Cars, Pickups, Sport Utility Vehicles, and Vans

	Safety Restraints			Costs of Injuries		
Injury Type	Used	Not Used	Unknown	Used	Not Used	Unknown
Fatality	75	85	18	$990,000,000	$1,122,000,000	$237,600,000
Suspected Serious Injury	509	211	113	$321,326,812	$133,202,274	$71,335,815
Suspected Minor Injury	3,119	403	380	$536,292,076	$69,293,269	$65,338,566
Possible Injury	4,703	330	475	$412,923,080	$28,973,978	$41,704,968
No Injury	42,320	1,601	4,706	$188,233,943	$7,121,043	$20,931,686
Total				**$2,448,775,911**	**$1,360,590,563**	**$436,911,035**

Self-reported seat belt use can be biased because of the penalties involved for not wearing a seat belt (meaning people misrepresent their belt use to avoid a ticket). The number of people using seat belts is higher for the less severe injury categories because of this bias, but also because seat belts lessen the severity of injuries sustained in crashes.

Local Safety Restraint Usage

Table 31 presents self-reported restraint use rates for all motor vehicle occupants, 7 years old and older, involved in fatal and serious injury crashes for each county, for 2019 through 2023. Crash data provides an analysis of the restraint use at the local level. This information is self-reported to the investigating officer after a crash. The self-reported use is for all occupants, regardless of injury type, involved in fatal and serious injury crashes. Values of "---" indicate there were no fatal or serious injury crashes.

Table 31
Self-Reported Restraint Use of All Occupants in Fatal and Serious Injury Crashes by County: 2019-2023
in Passenger Cars, Pickups, Sport Utility Vehicles, and Vans

County by Population	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2022-2023	Avg. Change 2019-2022
50,000 and over							
Ada	86.4%	77.5%	79.9%	79.9%	78.2%	-2.1%	-2.4%
Bannock	76.6%	50.0%	57.8%	64.1%	66.7%	4.0%	-2.7%
Bingham	77.6%	55.6%	54.6%	48.8%	57.0%	16.9%	-13.6%
Bonner	70.8%	53.4%	70.8%	59.3%	63.6%	7.3%	-2.8%
Bonneville	81.1%	60.8%	63.7%	68.5%	72.6%	6.0%	-4.3%
Canyon	83.5%	73.1%	71.3%	77.5%	72.3%	-6.7%	-2.1%
Kootenai	79.5%	77.7%	81.5%	69.1%	79.2%	14.7%	-4.2%
Madison	64.9%	71.9%	56.0%	73.9%	75.7%	2.4%	6.9%
Twin Falls	64.3%	66.9%	55.7%	63.5%	74.4%	17.2%	0.4%
20,000 - 49,999							
Blaine	78.1%	66.7%	74.4%	40.9%	59.0%	44.2%	-16.0%
Cassia	71.7%	87.2%	62.5%	67.2%	67.1%	-0.1%	0.2%
Elmore	75.9%	49.2%	70.7%	57.0%	40.7%	-28.6%	-3.7%
Gem	52.6%	72.2%	52.9%	89.5%	70.6%	-21.1%	26.5%
Jefferson	45.5%	50.0%	25.0%	57.6%	65.9%	14.4%	30.1%
Jerome	66.2%	59.1%	64.6%	63.3%	58.0%	-8.4%	-1.2%
Latah	66.7%	54.2%	66.7%	69.6%	57.9%	-16.8%	2.9%
Minidoka	13.3%	45.5%	46.3%	69.8%	69.8%	0.1%	97.8%
Nez Perce	62.7%	47.2%	54.1%	35.3%	51.0%	44.6%	-14.9%
Payette	74.2%	55.2%	82.0%	77.4%	77.3%	-0.2%	5.8%
10,000 - 19,999							
Benewah	92.3%	20.0%	44.4%	44.4%	52.6%	18.4%	14.6%
Boundary	81.8%	100.0%	41.7%	88.9%	68.2%	-23.3%	25.7%
Franklin	33.3%	80.0%	72.7%	45.5%	33.3%	-26.7%	31.1%
Fremont	57.1%	60.8%	67.4%	80.4%	47.4%	-41.1%	12.2%
Gooding	65.4%	34.6%	55.0%	47.1%	66.7%	41.7%	-0.9%
Idaho	63.3%	22.2%	64.7%	38.5%	65.5%	70.3%	28.6%
Owyhee	51.9%	39.3%	40.9%	56.7%	72.7%	28.3%	31.5%
Shoshone	50.0%	70.6%	42.9%	39.1%	60.0%	53.3%	-2.3%
Teton	80.0%	80.0%	85.7%	83.3%	85.7%	2.9%	34.8%
Valley	60.0%	65.8%	73.9%	68.4%	57.9%	-15.4%	4.9%
Washington	66.7%	25.0%	20.0%	83.3%	63.6%	-23.6%	78.1%

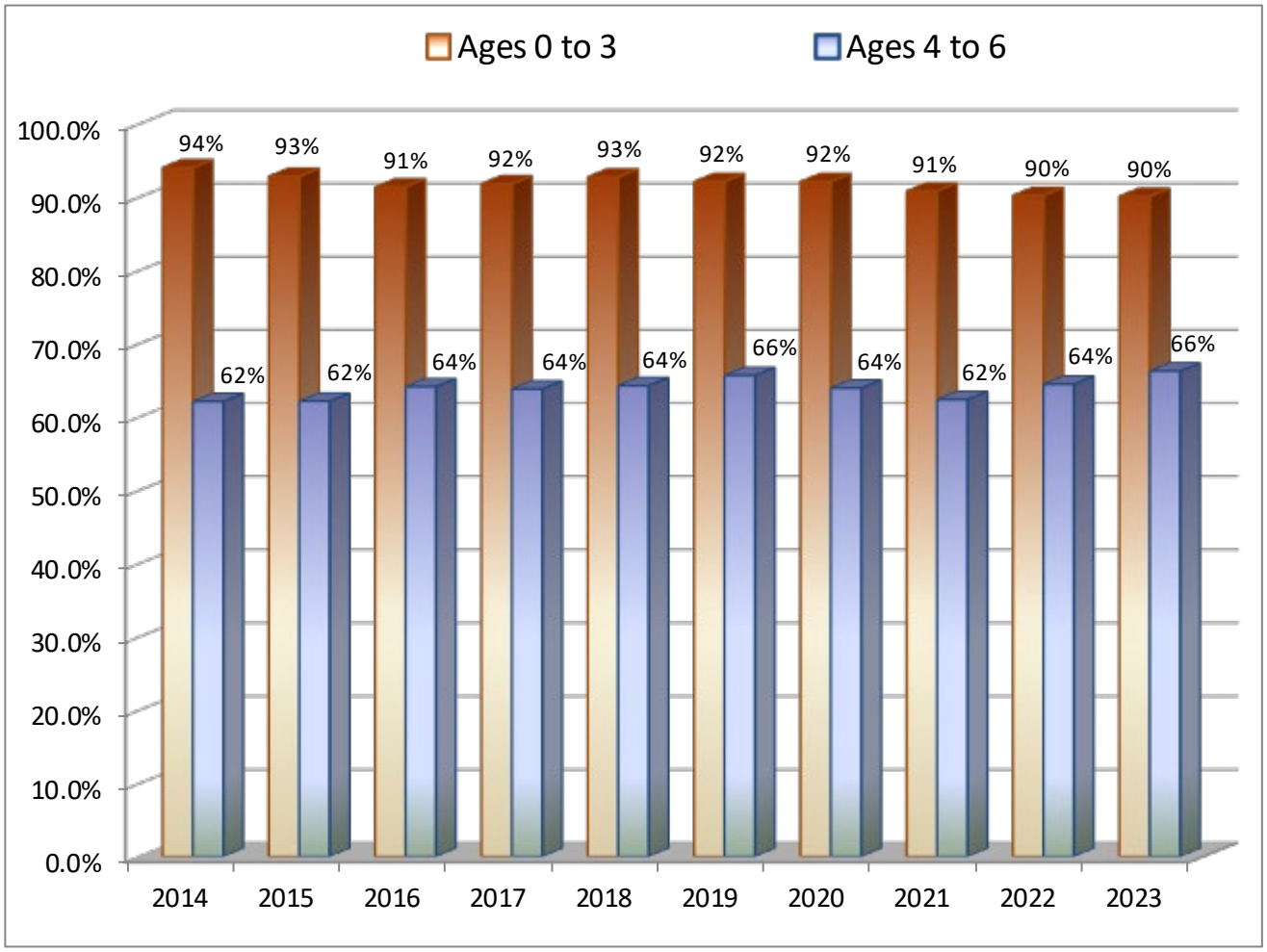
Table 31 (Continued)
Self-Reported Restraint Use of All Occupants in Fatal and Serious Injury Crashes by County: 2019-2023
in Passenger Cars, Pickups, Sport Utility Vehicles, and Vans

County by Population	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2022-2023	Avg. Change 2019-2022
5,000 - 9,999							
Bear Lake	66.7%	36.8%	33.3%	20.0%	53.8%	169.2%	-31.4%
Boise	87.1%	88.9%	41.4%	30.0%	67.7%	125.8%	-26.3%
Caribou	0.0%	60.0%	71.4%	25.0%	80.0%	220.0%	4.7%
Clearwater	33.3%	88.9%	41.7%	77.8%	87.5%	12.5%	22.3%
Lemhi	54.5%	46.7%	26.3%	40.0%	25.0%	-37.5%	-2.0%
Lincoln	37.5%	69.2%	20.0%	44.0%	75.0%	70.5%	44.5%
Power	50.0%	0.0%	34.5%	33.3%	79.7%	139.0%	-91.8%
0 - 4,999							
Adams	66.7%	33.3%	50.0%	----	33.3%	----	33.3%
Butte	27.3%	62.5%	85.7%	60.0%	85.7%	42.9%	45.4%
Camas	0.0%	----	62.5%	----	0.0%	----	----
Clark	0.0%	85.7%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%	200.0%	-0.4%
Custer	22.2%	22.2%	10.0%	25.0%	63.6%	154.5%	31.7%
Lewis	66.7%	40.9%	78.6%	50.0%	66.7%	33.3%	5.7%
Oneida	62.5%	74.2%	72.7%	75.0%	94.4%	25.9%	6.6%
Statewide Average	**74.4%**	**74.7%**	**66.0%**	**66.9%**	**69.9%**	**4.5%**	**-3.3%**

Child Safety Seat Usage by Age Groups

The child safety seat law was upgraded in 2005 to include all children under the age of 7 years old. The law took effect July 1, 2005. Prior to that, Idaho Code required every child, under the age of four, and weighing less than 40 pounds be restrained in a car safety seat that meets the federal standards when traveling in a non-commercial motor vehicle manufactured with seat belts after January 1, 1966.

Figure 14
Child Safety Seat Usage by Age Group in Crashes: 2014 - 2023



Parents are continuing to place their very young children (ages 0-3) in a child safety seat at a high rate (90%), while only 66% placed their toddlers (ages 4-6) in child safety seats or booster seats, even though they are too small for seat belts to fit them correctly.

Child Safety Seat – Self-Reported Usage

Table 32
Self-Reported Child Safety Seat Use by Injury Type: 2019-2023
Under Age 7
in Passenger Cars, Pickups, Sport Utility Vehicles, and Vans

Injury Type	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change 2022-2023	Avg. Change 2019-2022
Fatalities							
Restrained	5	1	1	0	1	100.0%	-60.0%
Unrestrained	0	0	4	0	1	100.0%	100.0%
Suspected Serious Injuries							
Restrained	6	5	5	5	8	60.0%	-5.6%
Unrestrained	4	2	4	8	10	25.0%	50.0%
Suspected Minor Injuries							
Restrained	63	42	48	55	64	16.4%	-1.5%
Unrestrained	22	23	31	36	33	-8.3%	18.5%
Possible Injuries							
Restrained	223	190	194	154	155	0.6%	-11.1%
Unrestrained	60	47	56	41	40	-2.4%	-9.8%
No Injuries							
Restrained	2,201	1,582	2,042	1,868	1,794	-4.0%	-2.5%
Unrestrained	514	381	436	460	428	-7.0%	-2.0%
Total Restrained	2,499	1,820	2,290	2,082	2,023	-2.8%	-3.5%
Total Unrestrained	600	453	622	548	515	-6.0%	0.3%
% of Children Restrained	80.6%	80.1%	78.6%	79.2%	79.7%	0.7%	-0.6%

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates child safety seats are 69% effective in preventing fatalities and serious injuries. By this estimate 2 lives were saved and another life may have been saved if all of these children had been properly restrained. Additionally, 18 serious injuries were prevented and 7 unrestrained serious injuries may have been prevented if they had all been properly restrained.