Injuries are the leading cause of death for Texans aged 1-44, yet we know public health policies can reduce many of the injuries that cause death and disability. Individuals can prevent most injuries by choosing safe behaviors, being educated on injury prevention, using safety equipment, and obeying safety laws. A high priority must be given to reducing preventable injuries from motor vehicle accidents, pedestrian and bicycle accidents, and falls.

Motor vehicle deaths contribute to 14,652 injuries and deaths in Texas each year, and nationally they are a major cause of death for children 14 and younger. Texas places some restrictions on texting while driving but is one of four states that have not banned it for all drivers. Texas law bans drivers under 18 years old from texting while driving, prohibits school bus drivers from using cellphones when children are present, and bars drivers from using a handheld device in school zones where signs are posted. For three legislative sessions, bills have been filed to prohibit texting while driving. In 2011 during the 82nd session, Gov. Rick Perry vetoed the bill that had passed the House and Senate.

Another senseless preventable injury is pool drownings. On average, two children drown per day — that is about 800 children in the United States who could be saved each year. The lack of sufficient barriers around pools is a key factor in drownings that can be addressed through installation of pool fencing in residential areas.

Reducing Preventable Injuries: What You Need to Know

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates fatal injury carries an average cost of about $991,027 in hospital costs only. In contrast, the National Safety Council puts the average fatality cost to society at $1.42 million.
- For every dollar in direct costs from preventable injury, indirect costs could be as much as $2.12, according to the National Safety Council.
- Distracted driving occurs when a driver is not fully attentive to the primary job of driving because he or she diverts attention to another task such as texting, checking email, talking on the phone, grooming, or eating.
- Sending or receiving a text message takes a driver's eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds on average. That is the equivalent of driving 55 miles per hour across the length of a football field without looking.
- Distracted driving led to more than 105,000 crashes in Texas in 2015, causing 476 deaths. Using a cellphone while driving increases by four times the likelihood of a crash serious enough to cause injury.
- In Texas, 104 children drowned in 2016, nearly half in pools or hot tubs. Nearly half of children were aged 1-4.
- Drowning is the leading cause of death for children aged 1-4, the second leading cause of death for children aged 5-14, and the third leading cause of unintentional injury death for children aged 15-17 and under the age of 1.
- About 80 percent of all fatal and nonfatal submersions occurred among children aged 14 and under in Texas in 2014.
- Nonfatal drownings often require hospitalization and can cause severe brain damage and long-term disability.

Public Health Capacity

Surveillance and data collection are essential to informing evidence-based injury-prevention measures and programs. Proper and comprehensive data to support intervention strategies are needed to find the most appropriate course of action. Knowledge and education can empower our communities to prevent injuries.

2017 Preventable Injury Priorities

- Promote driver responsibility by supporting a ban on texting while driving. Educate the public about the dangers of distracted driving.
- Develop incentives for communities and homeowners to expand the use of self-latching gates around swimming pools.

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1 2014 Texas All Injury Deaths and Rates per 100,000. https://webappa.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe.