

No More Myths about Motorcycle Helmets

I read an abstract this morning that interested me personally and may be of value for you when negotiating motorcycle accident settlements. The article was published on January 12th, 2011 in the Journal of the American College of Surgeons. The article, titled [Motorcycle Helmets Associated with Lower Risk of Cervical Spine Injury: Debunking the Myth](#) provides support for the Universal Helmet Law that has been repealed in several states. The authors suggest that there is a common myth that helmets **increase** the likelihood of cervical spine injuries

In this paper, the authors reviewed cases in the National Trauma Databank involving motorcycle collisions. The results were adjusted for age, race, gender, insurance status, injury severity, anatomic and physiologic severity and head injury. From 2002 through 2006 there were 62,840 cases of motorcycle collisions recorded in the databank. Included in the review were only those collision records that were complete, leaving 40,588 collisions. The study results demonstrated that helmeted riders have a lower proportion of cervical spine injuries compared to non-helmeted riders (3.5% versus 4.4%, $p < 0.05$).

The authors conclude that *“Helmeted motorcyclists are less likely to suffer a cervical spine injury after a motor cycle collision. This finding challenges a long standing objection to mandatory helmet use that claims helmets are associated with cervical spine injury.”* The authors suggest *“Re-enactment of the universal helmet law should be considered in states where it has been repealed”*

As a motorcycle enthusiast myself, I found this to be food for thought. When I was growing up in New York where we had no choice, everyone used helmets. When I moved to Connecticut and bought my first Harley (or as my friends call it, my first real motorcycle), no one I knew used helmets. Several years back, while completing my Masters in trauma biomechanics, I was taking a class at the University of Miami, Ryder Trauma Center. One class was about motorcycle trauma and the orthopedist opened his lecture by calling for a show of hands of who rides motorcycles. Upon half the class raising their hands, he let us know that “now we know who the stupid ones in the class are”. From his experience and perspective as a trauma surgeon, it was a no brainer.

I'm not sure how this can be used to your benefit as an attorney. On one hand, you can argue that despite being helmeted, your client still sustained a significant neck injury. On the other hand, you can take the position that your un-helmeted client had less than a 1% increased risk of neck injury so that the mitigating benefit of using a helmet is negligible.

For me, I am going to reconsider using a helmet when I ride. While I am concerned about cervical spine injury, I am more concerned about head injury. On that topic, the jury has concluded definitively that helmets save lives.

For additional information, please email me at Dr.Shaw@ShawChiropractic.com

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