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Unbelted backseat passengers can be deadly

BUFFALO, N.Y., Dec. 20 (UPI) -- Unbelted backseat passengers risk injury or death to themselves and the driver seated in front of them in the event of a head-on crash, said a U.S. study.

University of Buffalo researchers say that automobile sled tests simulating head-on crashes between two vehicles and using crash-test dummies have demonstrated the likelihood of severe head and chest traumas for driver and passenger caused by an unbelted passenger slamming into the seat of a belted driver.

The risk of severe injury was not evident during sled tests involving driver and passenger dummies restrained by seat belts, according to the researchers. A driver's side airbag was used in all tests.

"The tests show clearly that unrestrained rear-seat passengers place themselves, as well as their driver, at great risk of serious injury when involved in a head-on crash," says lead researcher James Mayrose of the University at Buffalo School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

"It doesn't matter if it's an adult-sized person seated behind you, a small child, or even if you have packages or luggage placed in the seat behind you, if they are not belted or safely secured, they can inflict fatal injuries to a driver."

The findings were published in the Journal of Trauma.

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