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Helmet Usage and Safety Fact Sheet

- In the 2019/20 season, approximately 86% of skiers and snowboarders at U.S. ski areas wore helmets
- Helmet usage at U.S. ski areas has increased every year for 18 consecutive years

Overview

Helmet usage by skiers and snowboarders at U.S. ski areas once again increased during the 2019/20 ski season. According to a recent study completed by the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), 86% of all skiers and snowboarders wore helmets during the most recent ski season. This sets yet another record for helmet usage at ski areas. Last season, 85% of skiers and snowboarders reported wearing helmets. NSAA began its helmet research in the 2002/03 season, when only 25% of skiers and snowboarders reported wearing helmets.

Methodology

The NSAA helmet study is conducted annually as part of a broader industry demographic analysis. To obtain statistically valid data, NSAA along with its research partner, RRC Associates (Boulder, Colo.), and employees from participating ski areas, conducted in-person interviews during the winter operating season at ski areas across the United States. Skiers and snowboarders interviewed were *not* asked if they wore helmets. Researchers did not explicitly ask the question but noted if the skier/snowboarder wore or possessed a helmet at the time of the interview.

Snowsports Helmets in Context

According to a recent, peer-reviewed study published in a scientific journal, potentially serious head injuries dropped from 4.2% of all ski injuries to 3% of all injuries from 1995 to 2012.¹ Researchers studied 17 seasons of ski helmet usage data and concluded that as helmet usage increased in the last 10 years, there was also a dramatic improvement in the decline of potentially serious head injuries (PSHI), notably concussions. The study's authors found that

¹ See "Role of Helmets in Mitigation of Head Injuries," Dr. Jasper Shealy, Dr. Robert Johnson, Carl Ettlinger, Dr. Irving Scher, *Skiing Trauma and Safety: 20th Volume, STP 1582, 2015.*

three-quarters of all PSHI from skiing or snowboarding were mild concussions, and 90% of PSHI are typically treated and released from hospitals or clinics within four hours. The study concluded that ski and snowboard helmets are extremely effective at preventing skull fractures, and have virtually eliminated scalp lacerations.

The age group with the greatest helmet usage was age 9 and under, with over 96%. The percentage of minors wearing helmets fell slightly across all age groups compared to the 2018/19 season. The age groups least likely to wear helmets are skiers and riders between 18-24 and 25-34 years old, with usage for each hovering around 82%. However, this is a dramatic increase from the 2002/03 season, when helmet usage was 18% (ages 18-24) and 25% (ages 24-35).

In most cases, wearing a helmet is a personal choice, and usage rates vary from region to region. However, the high rate of helmet usage generally is not attributable to government regulation or laws. Some ski areas have adopted requirements for helmet usage for employees and/or guests (including children in snowsports lessons). In 2011, New Jersey (which has three ski areas) became the first - and remains the only - state that requires those under the age of 18 to wear a helmet while skiing or snowboarding.

NSAA Helmet Safety Programming

A key part of NSAA's safety initiatives involves helmet safety, from assisting with peer-reviewed studies to outwardly promoting include [Lids On Kids](#), a program committed to educating parents and children on the importance and proper use of snowsports helmets.

Many ski areas educate their employees and guests about helmet safety and efficacy. These education efforts are highlighted across the country during NSAA National Safety Month every January. NSAA also recognizes that helmets are most effective when used in conjunction with other best practices, like skiing in control, being aware of other skiers and snowboarders, knowing how to load and unload lifts properly, and adhering to all signage and warnings. These are part of the ski industry's long-established Responsibility Code, adopted in the mid-1990s. Through the season, ski areas actively encourage guests to Know the Code, as well as the tenets of the Smart Style freestyle terrain safety initiative.

"The ski industry, and ski areas in particular, has done an incredible job of encouraging helmet use, and their success is reflected in ever-rising usage across the nation," said Kelly Pawlak, NSAA president. "The commitment of resorts, parents, industry influencers and medical professionals, combined with the tremendous improvements by helmet manufacturers to enhance helmet design and comfort, has helped grow helmet usage organically among skiers and snowboarders."

Despite the efficacy of helmets against injury, it is important to emphasize the role of personal responsibility in overall safety on the slopes. "The collective industry efforts to promote helmet use should be applauded," Kelly Pawlak stated. "At the same time, we stress that skiing and riding safely and responsibly, in addition to wearing a helmet, is the best way to prevent incidents and injuries out on the mountain."

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The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) is a trade association representing the interests of ski area operators and industry suppliers. Formed in 1962, NSAA designs and supports ski industry initiatives and programs, including growth, safety and sustainability, from its Lakewood, Colo., headquarters. Learn more about NSAA's mission and programs at [NSAA.org](https://www.nsa.org).