

July 8th, 2015

Northern Health is pleased to participate in the discussion on distracted driving. Despite growing awareness of this significant road safety issue, distracted driving remains a lead factor contributing to motor vehicle crash injuries and fatalities. Northern Health recognizes distracted driving as a significant concern and road safety priority, and is committed to protecting the right of all to live, work and play injury-free.

Northern Health covers a vast geographic area of nearly 600,000 square kilometers, similar to the size of France. Northern Health's region includes communities ranging in population from a few hundred people to over 80,000. Our vast landscape features rugged shorelines, coastal and island communities, rivers and lakes, fertile prairie, rolling foothills and majestic mountains. Our climate includes all four distinct seasons, each offering its own beauty and increased risk for traffic related injuries. Northern BC residents face significant challenges on roads and highways, such as longer distances to destinations, altered road conditions due to extreme weather or industrial road conditions (i.e. oilfield and logging roads), animals on the roads and heavy commercial vehicle traffic. As distractions significantly reduce a driver's ability to react to the many demands on our northern roads, the safest way to arrive at one's destination is to focus on the road and avoid distractions.

Across Northern Health, motor vehicle crashes rank as one of the top two leading causes of injury deaths and this trend has remained constant over the years. Between 2001 and 2011, there were 672 fatalities and 8'160 hospitalizations as a result of injury on Northern BC roads. In 2011, 28.4% of all injury deaths were caused by motor vehicle crashes with an additional 706 individuals requiring hospitalization.

Through a public health approach that concurrently targets Education, Enforcement, Engineering and Engagement, injuries from distracted driving can be prevented, trauma and lives saved, and financial burdens avoided. Based on current data, Northern Health recommends supporting a comprehensive approach to collaboratively implement evidence-based injury prevention strategies to effectively reduce the number of deaths and hospitalizations from motor vehicle crashes related to distracted driving.
