

Buckle up even in buses

Even crashes at low speeds dangerous, says expert

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PETALING JAYA: You're a passenger in a bus moving at a speed of between 40kph and 60kph. Suddenly, the driver hits the brakes.

If you're not wearing a seat belt, the impact could be dire. And if the bus was speeding at about 120kph, it could well be fatal.

"At more than 80kph, unrestrained passengers face extreme danger," says road safety expert Assoc Prof Law Teik Hua.

"A survivable crash for passengers (who fastened their seat belts) can be deadly for those unbuckled.

"The risk rises sharply above 60kph, with high fatality likelihood in rollovers or ejections.

"Even a stop at moderate speeds can generate enough force to throw unbuckled passengers forward, leading to head injuries or collision with seats, windows or other passengers."

Law, who heads the Road Safety Research Centre at Universiti Putra Malaysia's Engineering Faculty, said low speed collisions could also see unrestrained passengers suffering from whiplash, neck strains and even spinal injuries.

Low-speed collisions, he said, are those at speeds of 20kph and 40kph.

In major collisions and rollovers, Law said seat belts can prevent the passenger from being thrown around, which is one of the main causes of death in such crashes.

"Seat belts are important in



All seated: While buses are structurally safer than cars because of their size and construction, the lack of seat belt use can turn even a minor collision into a major incident. — CHAN BOON KAI/The Star

keeping bus passengers safe, just like in private cars.

"Buses are structurally safer because of their size and construction, but the lack of seat belt use can turn even a minor collision into a major incident.

He said a complete strategy — comprising vehicle safety standards, driver training and public awareness — is important when it comes to safety in buses.

Buses must meet United Nations Regulations No. 66 and No. 107 standards, which subject them to structural integrity and rollover resistance tests.

"Periodic inspection of brakes, tyres and suspension systems are a must.

"Defensive driving and fatigue management training can minimise human error.

"Speed limiters, Global Positioning Systems monitoring and

dashcams are also technologies that can monitor and deter reckless driving," he said.

Law said public address systems, display boards and targeted social media campaigns can enhance knowledge and awareness on seat belt usage.

He said enforcement measures by the Road Transport Department are a step in the right direction, adding that pairing fines with public education campaigns like crash simulation demos may enhance compliance.

"Express and school buses that tend to travel at higher speeds must be prioritised in seat belt enforcement.

"Repeat offenders, be it drivers or operators, must be hit with harsher penalties, including license suspension or fleet limitations," he said.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malay-

sia's Dr Nurul Hafeezah Sahak called for a national reporting database where bus passengers could provide feedback on safety concerns such as driver behaviour.

"The feedback can then be submitted to the authorities to enable timely monitoring, investigation and corrective action," said Nurul Hafeezah, who is with the university's Faculty of Science and Technology.

She said seatbelt use can reduce the risk of injuries by at least 50% in the event of a road crash.

"Even when passengers wear seatbelts, the effectiveness depends on proper usage," Nurul Hafeezah said.

She said Malaysians should exercise the same amount of caution and awareness towards road crashes as they did with the Covid-19 pandemic.