

# The Salt Lake Tribune

FRIDAY, August 1, 2008

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**E.R. visits up  
Docs warn that texting could be hazardous to your health**

Tribune Staff and Wire Services

Article Last Updated: 07/31/2008 10:23:33 AM MDT

The warning came too late for Barack Obama's adviser: Don't walk and text at the same time.

Valerie Jarrett fell off a Chicago curb several weeks ago while her thumbs were flying on her BlackBerry.

"It was a nice wake-up call for me to be a lot more careful in the future, because I clearly wasn't paying attention and I should have," she said.

Jarrett got off easy with a twisted ankle and didn't need medical attention. But in an alert issued this week, the American College of Emergency Physicians warns of the danger of more serious accidents involving oblivious texters.

The E.R. doctors cite rising reports from physicians around the country of injuries involving text-messaging pedestrians, bicyclists, Rollerbladers, even motorists.

In Utah, emergency doctors report seeing more neck, head and back injuries due to distractions including texting, reaching for CDs in the car or teen drivers goofing off with their passengers. Cell phone use is enough of a concern that researchers want to track when the devices are involved in trauma injuries, said Charles Pruitt, an emergency doctor at Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City.

"It's a dangerous trend whenever people are involved in something that is so distracting," he said.

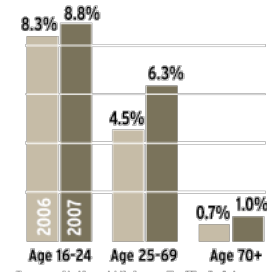
Mark Bair, an emergency room doctor at Payson's Mountain View Hospital, said texting while driving should be outlawed.

"It always amazes me when somebody says they were texting a short message [while driving]," Bair said. "Why would you even think about doing that?"

E.R. doctors who responded to a recent informal query from the national organization said most text-related injuries involve scrapes, cuts and sprains from texters who walked into lampposts or walls or tripped

**Teens are most distracted drivers**

Six percent of U.S. drivers used hand-held cell phones in 2007, according to survey in which drivers were observed at stop lights and stop signs. And 0.6 percent of drivers visibly manipulate hand-held devices, like texting, surfing the Internet on their PDAs or playing video games. Young drivers were most likely to use hand-held cell phones:



Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
The Salt Lake Tribune

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over curbs.

"We see mild injuries like that," agreed Jeffrey Cline, a pediatrician at the University Hospital clinic in Midvale. "I haven't had anybody say, 'I was texting and ran into a wall.' I wouldn't cop to that either."

Noting that 46 percent of teens text while driving - revealed in a 2007 AAA/Seventeen magazine survey - Cline said parents and pediatricians need to warn teen drivers of the risks.

"It sounds like common sense but they need to have that discussion," he said.

Chris Dallin, spokesman for McKay Dee Hospital in Ogden, said doctors are seeing more turned ankles and some broken bones after people have fallen down the stairs while texting.

"There's even a few older teenagers that have come in and their thumbs hurt from texting too much. When that starts happening, it's time to put down the cell phone," Dallin said.

Nationally, E.R. doctors reported two pedestrians who died while using their cell phones.

A San Francisco woman was killed by a pickup truck earlier this year when she stepped off a curb while using her cell phone. A Bakersfield man was killed last year by a car while crossing the street and talking to his wife on the phone.

In Utah, a Tremonton man is being prosecuted for a 2007 double fatality for allegedly driving and text-messaging on his cell phone. Last week, a driver ran a red light in Salt Lake City while texting, injuring another driver and a pedestrian.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has no national estimate on how common texting-related injuries are.

But among the reports it has received: A 15-year-old girl fell off her horse while texting, suffering head and back injuries, and a 13-year-old girl suffered belly, leg and arm burns after texting her boyfriend while cooking noodles.

The E.R. group says people should never text while driving, and should avoid talking on a phone or texting while doing other physical activities, including walking, biking, boating and Rollerblading.

Still, Eric Gilbert, an emergency doctor at Altaview Hospital in Sandy and Intermountain Medical Center in Murray, said teens driving with other teens is more dangerous than cell phone use.

He's also treated injuries from teen drivers towing their friends on bikes and skateboards.

"I would say: 'Don't drive with other teens,' " he said. "There are pressures to drive faster, run lights, run stop signs, to get other friends in other cars attention. Anything but driving."

- HEATHER MAY contributed to this report.

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