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## Helmet Usage and Safety Fact Sheet

- In the 2018/19 season, approximately 85 percent of skiers and snowboarders at U.S. ski areas wore helmets
- 99% of kids age 9 and under wear helmets
- Helmet usage at U.S. ski areas has increased every year for 17 consecutive years
- Helmet usage has proven to reduce some head injuries
- The age group least likely to wear helmets is 18 to 24 years old, with 80 percent usage

### Overview

Helmet usage by skiers and snowboarders at U.S. ski areas once again increased during the 2018/19 ski season. According to a recent study completed by the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), 85 percent 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, 84 percent of skiers and snowboarders reported wearing helmets. NSAA began its helmet research in the 2002/03 season, when only 25 percent 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 at 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 percent of all ski injuries to 3 percent of all injuries from 1995 to

2012.<sup>1</sup> 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 three-quarters of all PSHI from skiing or snowboarding were mild concussions, and 90 percent 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 percentage of *minors* wearing helmets continues to set new records. According to the NSAA helmet study, 95 percent of skiers and snowboarders aged 17 and under wore helmets during the 2018/19 season. NSAA's inaugural helmet study, conducted with data from the 2002/03 season, only 32 percent of minors wore helmets. This year's survey also found that 99 percent of kids aged 9 and under wore helmets in the 2018/19 season. The age group least likely to wear helmets is 18 to 24 years old, with 80 percent wearing helmets last season. However, this is still a dramatic increase from the 2002/03 season, when only 18 percent of that age group wore helmets.<sup>2</sup>

Helmet usage is generally a personal choice, and can 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 two 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

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

<sup>2</sup> These percentages come from a survey of over 73,000 snowsports participants nationwide. See graphic on page 4.

enhance helmet design and comfort, has helped grow helmet usage organically among skiers and snowboarders without legislative influence.”

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](http://NSAA.org).