

# Keep on Truckin' - The Latest on Illness & Accidents in the Transportation/Trucking Industry

By Nasir Adil & Kimberly Wagner  
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## Trucking Hazards

Drivers will face numerous hazards that could lead to life-threatening injuries. Traffic congestion, road construction, detours, poor road conditions, and inclement weather are the most common road hazards faced by drivers.



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## Driver Fatigue

To address the problem of driving while tired, Canadian and American industry experts and regulators have developed the North American Fatigue Management Program (NAFMP). The program provides online educational courses/modules for carrier executives and managers, commercial drivers, drivers' families, dispatchers, and shippers/receivers to reduce the number of accidents caused by driver fatigue.



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## Driver Fatigue

Voluntary courses include Safety Culture and Management Practices, Driver Sleep Disorders Management, Driver Family Education, Driver Scheduling and Tools, and Fatigue Monitoring and Management Technologies.



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## Health and Mental Health

There are over 3 million truck drivers employed in the commercial transportation and material moving occupations, one of the largest occupational groups in the United States. Workers are at risk for a range of occupational health-induced conditions, including:

- mental health and psychiatric disorders due to high occupational stress
- low access and use of health care
- limited social support

The purpose of this study was to explore male truck drivers' mental health risks and associated comorbidities



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## Health and Mental Health

- Surveyed truckers were found to have significant issues affecting their mental health, such as loneliness (27.9%), depression (26.9%), chronic sleep disturbances (20.6%), anxiety (14.5%), and other emotional problems (13%).
- Findings have potential to help researchers develop interventions to improve the emotional and occupational health of truck drivers.



## Health and Mental Health

Mental health promotion, assessment, and treatment must become a priority to improve the overall trucking environment for truckers, the transportation industry, and safety on US highways.



## No Drugs Allowed!!

In order to keep awake, drivers may revert to taking drugs. Long haul drivers are prohibited from using any controlled substances unless the substance is being used as an authorized legal prescription by a licensed physician. Under CFR Title 49, Part 382, commercial motor vehicle drivers are prohibited from using alcohol or illegal drugs while on duty and when performing safety-sensitive functions within four hours of consuming alcohol.



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## No Drugs Allowed!!

The Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act of 1991 requires drug and alcohol testing of safety-sensitive transportation employees in trucking and other transportation industries; the DOT publishes rules on who must conduct alcohol and drug tests, how to conduct the tests, and what procedures to use when testing.



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## No Drugs Allowed!!



A recent study showed that :

- 30% of truck drivers admitted to taking amphetamines on the job.
- **20% used marijuana**
- 3% used cocaine.

These drugs keep the drivers awake unnaturally, and compel them to take more risks like faster driving, unsafe lane changes, and using risky maneuvers in bad weather. Once those stimulants begin to wear off, the drivers are more likely to fall asleep at the wheel.



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## No Alcohol Allowed!

The Federal Highway Transportation Authority (FHWA) established .04 as the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level at or above which a commercial truck driver is deemed to be driving under the influence and subject to disqualification sanctions. As a comparison, individual states have BAC levels between .08% and .10% for noncommercial drivers.



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## No Alcohol Allowed!

DOT regulations note that a driver who has been convicted of driving while under the influence of a controlled substance or alcohol will lose their driving privilege for three years.



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## Pre-Employment Tests

DOT regulations do not establish consequences for applicants or employees who have a positive result in a pre-employment drug test. The DOT requires firms to obtain from applicants' information from the previous two years concerning any positive drug tests and alcohol tests with results of at least .04 BAC, or any refusals to be tested.



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## Pre-Employment Tests

As of 2023, the DOT simplified pre-employment drug testing to require that drivers be tested before being allowed to operate a commercial motor vehicle.



## Preexisting Health Issues

Other hazards long haul drivers face are lifestyle factors and challenges of being on the road for extended periods of time. A study in 2019 by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) on the health hazards of long haul drivers concluded that truckers are twice as likely to be obese and are more likely to smoke than the rest of working adults.

These conditions can lead to heart attack, stroke, diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, and other illnesses.



# Preexisting Health Issues

There are a number of reasons for contracting these conditions:

- truckers' nutrition/diet needs are not met at roadside diners because they offer limited healthy choices
- drivers have inadequate access to facilities for exercise
- drivers have limited access to traditional medical care resources
- drivers can spend days or weeks away from home, which can lead to stressful relationships



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# Preexisting Health Issues



Other dangers challenging the health of long haul drivers have to do with their work environment, including sleeping in truck berths, as well as lengthy periods of sitting while driving and then physical activity of loading or unloading trucks.

Also the work cabs are subject to continuous vibration, which can cause fatigue, insomnia, changes in oxygen intake, and chronic back pain.



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## Truck Accidents



277 people were killed, and another 3,939 people were hurt in crashes involving a large truck or bus in California last year.

Out of the 8,696 times that a truck or a bus was involved in an accident, 244 of those crashes had at least one reported fatality



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## Truck Accidents

Based on the reported accidents, some of the trucking companies with the most accidents are:

- **Werner Enterprises** – 960 collisions over a two-year period.
- **Swift Transportation** – 1,500 collisions in two years.
- **U.S. Xpress** – 1,448 collisions in two years.



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## Types of Injuries

**Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) of the neck, back and upper extremities** – These issues can be caused by loading or unloading the truck or lifting boxes, cartons, containers, garbage cans, tanks or bins. They can also arise when using vehicle dollies or loaders and working on vehicle tires. The majority of MSD claims occur as a result of overexertion during the loading process.



## Types of Injuries

**Falls from elevations** – Falling from vehicles, falling on stairs and falling into openings are all possible causes of workplace injury for truckers. These injuries can occur when making deliveries on upper floors, exiting the truck or stepping into holes at loading or unloading areas. The most common causes of injuries related to falls from elevations are knee and back sprains that occur when falling out of a vehicle.



## Types of Injuries

### Falls on the same level –

These injuries can occur when lifting the latch on the back of the truck, putting on tire chains or unloading the truck. Back and knee sprains are the most common injuries caused by falls on the same level.



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## Types of Injuries

### Injuries due to being struck by or against

**objects** – Workers can be struck by or against objects when lifting hitched trailers, opening containers and attaching trailers to trucks. The objects that a worker may hit or be hit by include vehicle parts, lift-gates, winch bars, pallet jacks, boxes or cartons or binders and chains. The most common injuries caused by being hit or struck by objects are back sprains and strains that occur when boxes or cartons fall on the driver.



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## Types of Injuries

**Vehicle-related injuries** – More than half of all truck driver fatalities are caused by vehicle-related injuries. Workers may be hurt when they lose control of the vehicle or when they collide with another car. Workers are at risk not only of getting hurt in a car accident but also of being rolled over by their own vehicle.



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## Types of Injuries

Truck drivers who perform different types of work face different injuries. For example, truck drivers delivering to residential areas may be at risk of slipping and falling when walking up to someone's porch to make a delivery. Those driving industrial trucks may be more likely to suffer injuries due to problems with loading and unloading heavy materials or problems with malfunctioning lift gates.



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