# Study finds SUVs pose higher fatality risk to pedestrians and cyclists than standard cars



A comprehensive study conducted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and Imperial College London has revealed that pedestrians and cyclists are significantly more likely to die if struck by an SUV compared to a traditional hatchback or saloon car. The study, covering over 680,000 road collisions spanning 35 years, found that the likelihood of death for vulnerable road users is 44% higher when hit by 4X4-style vehicles compared to standard cars, rising alarmingly to 82% for children.

Researchers compiled and analysed data from 24 studies, predominantly from the US but also from Europe including France, Germany, and the Netherlands. They compared injury severity between those hit by standard cars and light truck vehicles, a category which includes SUVs, small vans, and pick-up trucks. The research, published in the journal Injury Prevention, attributes the increased fatality risk primarily to SUVs' taller, wider, and heavier build. Their elevated front end tends to strike pedestrians at pelvis height rather than knees, resulting in more severe injuries, while children are more often hit in the head. Additionally, SUVs' squared-off grilles and bumpers can cause individuals to be thrown forward, sometimes resulting in secondary impacts or being rolled over by the vehicle.

The rising popularity of SUVs has been substantial. In the UK, they accounted for a third of car registrations in 2024, a stark increase from just 12% in 2014. This surge has positioned SUVs as the country's most favoured car type. The trend reflects broader global patterns: the report estimates SUVs make up 20% of car crashes in Europe and 45% in the US. The researchers assert replacing all SUVs with standard cars could reduce pedestrian and cyclist fatalities by approximately 8% in Europe and 17% in the US.

Anna Goodman, assistant professor at LSHTM and senior author of the study, stressed the impact of this trend, stating to the Daily Mail, "Our findings indicate that this proliferation of larger vehicles threatens to undermine all the road safety gains being made on other fronts." She highlighted global efforts where cities and countries are enacting measures to discourage the use of large vehicles.

Tanya Braun, director of external affairs and fundraising at charity Living Streets, also commented, saying to PA, "It's clear that SUVs make people, especially children, less safe while walking on our streets. Nearly 50 child pedestrians are killed or injured in England every day, and every one of those deaths is a tragedy. We urgently need more measures to protect pedestrians."

The study's findings arrive amid increased scrutiny of SUVs due to their size, pollution levels, and impact on urban infrastructure. SUVs are typically larger, which poses challenges on roads and parking spaces, leading to calls for stricter regulations and fees in some UK local authorities. For example, councils in Cardiff and Bristol are considering higher residential parking permit fees for SUV owners, while Reading Council is exploring a system where SUVs pay double for on-street and permit parking due to concerns over air quality and emissions.

SUVs contribute disproportionately to carbon emissions. The International Energy Agency reported in 2024 that if SUVs were treated as a country, their CO₂ emissions would rank fifth globally. Additionally, Transport & Environment noted that car widths have increased by an average of 1cm every two years, largely driven by the popularity of "mega SUVs" that can be up to 220cm wide and create difficulties for other road users, including cyclists.

The growing weight of SUVs also exacerbates road damage and pothole formation. Autocar data showed the average kerb weight of new cars increased by nearly 400kg between 2016 and 2023, driven by SUVs' dominance in the market. Research from the Clean Cities pressure group highlighted that a two-ton SUV can cause 16 times more road damage than a one-ton car, prompting public support for higher taxes on SUVs to help fund road repairs.

SUV sales have soared over the past decade, with the category transitioning from a niche market to the most popular car body shape. In 2024, SUVs made up 33% of new vehicle registrations in the UK. Car manufacturers have responded by expanding their SUV offerings, with brands including Volkswagen, BMW, Audi, Kia, Ford, Mercedes, Toyota, Nissan, Hyundai, and MG providing a large proportion of their models in SUV form.

Mike Hawes, chief executive of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), commented to This is Money, "Manufacturers respond to consumer demand and, increasingly, drivers are attracted to 'dual purpose' [SUV] vehicles given their practicality, comfort and good view of the road." He also noted the shift towards electric SUVs, with many models being zero emission, which has contributed to halving the average CO₂ emissions of new SUVs since 2000.

New Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) regulations in the UK, introduced in April 2024, have notably increased taxes on heavier and more polluting SUVs. Certain high-end models such as the Land Rover Defender 90/110 V8 petrol and Jeep Wrangler Rubicon face first-year tax bills upwards of £5,490. Environmental campaigners argue for further tax reforms linking costs to vehicle weight and usage distance, aiming to better address the environmental and infrastructural impact of SUVs.

This detailed body of research and growing market trends illuminate the complex implications of the SUV phenomenon on road safety, urban environments, and environmental concerns. The information aggregated from various studies and expert comments provides comprehensive insight into the multifaceted effects of SUVs in modern transport landscapes.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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