

## AAA warns of dangers wearing headphones while driving



Posted: Wed 5:06 PM, Dec 28, 2016

**TOLEDO, Ohio (WTVG)** - Wearing earbuds, headphones, or the brand new AirPods, the wireless earbuds just unfurled by Apple, over both of your ears while driving might make you look cool, but those "songs that get stuck in your head," might be the least of your problems. Listening to music on headphones, earbuds, or the latest wireless "thingy," on your ears while driving is a distraction and a traffic safety issue, cautions AAA.

"Wearing earbuds or headphones, while driving could intensify your sensory deprivation and cognitive distraction level, potentially creating additional dangers on our roadways," states Cindy Antrican, Public Affairs Manager for AAA.

Not only is the distracting behavior dangerous, it could also increase your odds of being pulled over and ticketed by the police. That is because it is illegal in Ohio to wear or use one or more headphones or earphones while driving. The only exemptions are for speakers built into protective headgear used by law enforcement and emergency services personnel and those wearing hearing aids.

There are only 14 states that have some type of restrictions on "earplugs, earphones, or earbuds" while driving, unless you are hearing impaired, according to the AAA Digest of Motor Laws. Four states have complete bans. Kentucky, Indiana and Michigan have no restrictions on wearing earbuds while driving.

Wearing earplugs could also increase your risk factor on the road as some models have noise cancellation acoustical technology, which may cause you to miss some important cues for driving safely such as hearing the sirens of approaching emergency service vehicles and other background noises such as horns or rail road warnings. "Unfortunately, distracted driving laws haven't kept pace with the changing technology, and many drivers don't have a clue what is legal or illegal regarding headphones while driving or operating a vehicle," states Antrican. "In the interest of traffic safety, motorists should maintain "driver concentration" at all times, however it is not only drivers who are at risk of death and injuries."

It seems headphones or earbuds for iPods and MP3 players are everywhere on highways and sidewalks, and everyone is distracted and less aware of their surroundings these days. Other highway users wear earbuds or headphones while jogging, walking, skating, skateboarding or riding a bicycle or even a motorcycle. All road users should be mindful of traffic while listening to headphones and the dangers that accompany this distraction.

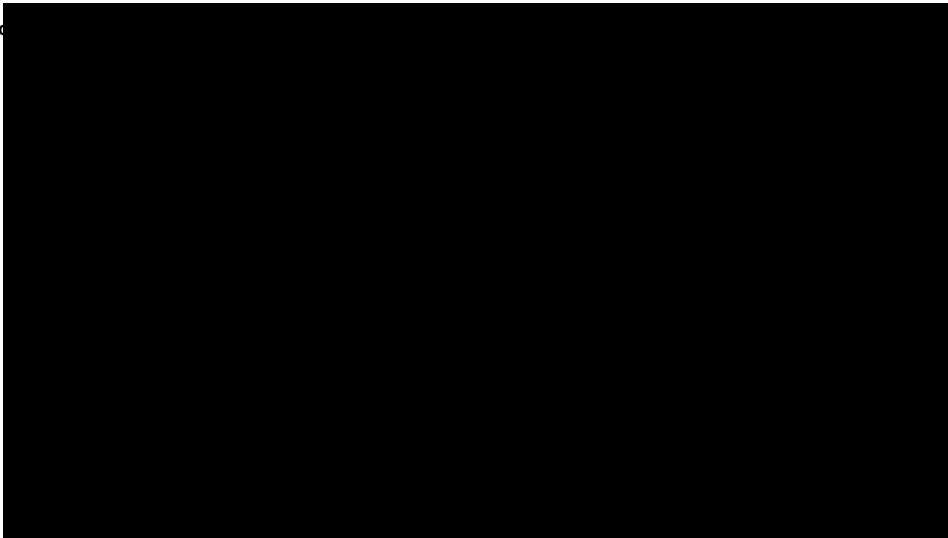
For safety reasons, more research is warranted on drivers using headphones or earphones over the ears. Researchers at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore underscored the safety risks of fatalities and injuries for pedestrians wearing headphones. The research team found that the number of serious injuries tripled over a six-year period. They also concluded, "there were 116 reports of death or injury of pedestrians wearing headphones." The researchers warned "the distraction caused by the use of electronic devices has been coined 'inattention blindness,' in which multiple stimuli divide the brain's mental resource allocation."

What about drivers? Using portable music players, ranks as one of the "most commonly performed potentially distracting behaviors while driving," according to a National Survey on Distracted Driving Attitudes and Behaviors conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in 2012.

"At the end of the day, it is not known how many deaths or injuries stem from drivers wearing headphones, earphones or earbuds," states Antrican. "While most states allow the use of hands-free devices while driving, it is imperative that drivers do everything within their power to avoid actions and activities that hamper their ability to 'hear potential danger and to respond accordingly'. If your mind is off the road, it is still a cognitive distraction."

AAA provides automotive, travel and insurance services to 56 million members nationwide and more than three million members in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana. AAA advocates for the safety and mobility of its members and has been committed to outstanding road service for more than 100 years. The not-for-profit, fully tax-paying member organization works on behalf of motorists, who can now map a route, find local gas prices, discover discounts, book a hotel and track their roadside assistance service with the AAA Mobile app for iPhone, iPad and Android. For more information, visit [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com).

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