Stay alive this festive season

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Surgeons from across Australia and New Zealand are urging caution and restraint in regard to speed, alcohol and road safety awareness over the Festive season, in what is traditionally a busy time for emergency departments across the country.

Chair of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) Trauma Committee Dr John Crozier says that speed is still the biggest contributor to fatal road accidents across much of the country and common sense must prevail.

“This time last year, 192 people died on Australian roads in December and January, and 52 in New Zealand,” Dr Crozier said.

“The burden of injury is much higher, with the Australian Trauma Registry reporting 20,435 seriously injured patients treated between 2010 and 2012 at 27 trauma centres around Australia. About half of these were road-related.”

Dr Crozier said that alcohol also plays a huge part in road trauma and over one in five drivers and riders killed on Australian roads have blood alcohol levels that exceed the legal limit.

“On behalf of all trauma surgeons in Australia and New Zealand, please don’t underestimate the danger of drinking and driving, especially over the holiday break when alcohol is ever present,” Dr Crozier said.

“Take more caution when deciding whether you are capable of driving - make sure you know whether you are over the legal limit, and if in doubt, don’t get behind the wheel.”

RACS has also warned this year of other road-related dangers such as driving and talking or texting on the phone, which is also a contributing factor in one in five car crashes and two in three truck crashes.

“Using your phone while driving, riding a bicycle or as a pedestrian can be fatal, and it is not just your life you are putting at risk, but the lives of other road users.

“Motorcyclists are also a high risk category for road trauma, and even though the weather might be warming up, people should know that in the event of a crash, around half of all injured riders sustain leg injuries.

“Protective clothing may not be as comfortable or stylish as you’d like, but the Australian rate of motorcyclist deaths is around 30 times the rate for car occupants.

“The corresponding rate for a serious injury is approximately 41 times higher, and protective clothing can make all the difference.”

More than half of the trauma surgery undertaken in Australia is road transport related. Annually there are 32,000 hospitalisations for serious injury and 1,400 deaths. The financial cost each year is $27 billion.

“We urge all Australians and New Zealanders - particularly the younger generation - to think seriously about the danger to themselves and others while using the roads over the summer months.”

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About RACS

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery.

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