

# NIATT *Research Summary*

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## Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Fatal Crash Rates for RITI Communities in Idaho

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### Description

In March 2020, the outbreak of the coronavirus 2019 was declared a pandemic. This was followed by a response that has had significant effects on all aspects of people's life impacting all their economic and social activities. These work-at-home, business closure, and travel restrictions has significantly disrupted the nation's transportation reducing travel to significant lower levels especially during the second quarter of 2020. While the reduced vehicle travel miles during most of 2020 would have reduced the risk of collisions, recent statistics in the US show a considerable increase in fatal crashes in the nine months that followed the travel restriction in 2020 compared to the same period in previous years.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration NHTSA's early estimates show that 38,680 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes in 2020. This is the largest number of fatalities since 2007. Preliminary data from the Federal Highway Administration shows that while VMT in 2020 decreased by approximately 13.2-percent compared to 2019, the fatality rate for 2020 was 23.4-percent higher than that for 2019.

In May 2020, the National Police Foundation published a fact sheet based on their examination of traffic crashes and fatalities from an initial sample of five states: Florida, Iowa, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Missouri.

The fact sheet states: "While the number of traffic and fatal crashes decreased across the states, fatality rates increased across each state during April and in parts of March compared to 2019 data.

These data may suggest a probable increase in behaviors that should cause concern among policymakers, including what appears to be an increase in excessive speed and reckless driving among motorists." It also adds that "early anecdotal information suggested that reduced traffic congestion on the roads was due to stay-at-home orders as well as businesses that are either closed or running on reduced operations.

This research examines the Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on fatal crash rates for RITI communities in several states and identifies factors that might have contributed to such impact in fatal crash rates.