

# Hazards of Texting

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Texting-on-the-go is just the latest tech-created public nuisance, one that's spreading quickly across a world still grappling with cell phone-addled drivers and wireless-headset users who appear to be speaking too loudly to no one in particular. Like driving cell phone users, mobile texters typing furiously into their cell phones, BlackBerry devices or iPhones can be safety hazards.

James Adams, Northwestern's chairman of emergency medicine, says he has treated patients involved in texting incidents nearly every day this summer. He says fallen texters are more prone to facial injuries: They tend to hold their devices close to their faces, so their hands are less likely to break their fall. "By the time their hands hit, their face immediately hits and they smash to the ground," Dr. Adams says. The common outcomes are scraped chins, noses and foreheads, along with broken glasses.

Because of the inevitable distractions and subsequent dangers related to texting and the use of other electronic devices such as iPods, Dr. Adams advised the following common-sense safety measures:

- Don't text or use a cell phone while engaged in any physical activities that require sustained attention; such activities include walking, biking, boating, rollerblading or even intermittent-contact sports such as baseball, football or soccer.
- Never text or use a hand-held cell phone while driving or motorcycling, and use caution even with headsets.
- Avoid becoming distracted by rummaging through purses, backpacks or clothing by keeping cell phones and blackberries in easy-to-find locations, such as phone pockets or pouches.
- Ignore the call or message if it might interfere with concentration during critical activities that require attention. Better yet, turn off the device beforehand

during times when incoming calls or messages might prove to be a dangerous or even simply embarrassing or annoying interference.

- Be mindful of the distraction and corresponding reflex-response delay that texting can cause, and don't text in any environments in which excessive inattention can cause safety concerns, such as while sitting alone at night, waiting for a bus, or in a crowded area, where one could easily become a victim of a personal theft.

"The bottom line is to be aware of potential safety concerns and to simply exercise caution, restraint and good judgment at all times when using a cell phone or blackberry," said Dr. Adams.



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