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Health

Scooters are a good transportation source, but can be a safety risk

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Low-angle view of two motor scooters from sharing economy company Bird parked along a street in the Marina Del Rey neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, October 21, 2018. Photo by: Smith Collection/Gado/Getty Images

By USA Today, adapted by Newsela staff  
Published: 01/04/2019 Word Count: 867

AUSTIN, Texas – Scooters whisking riders around cities like Austin, Texas, and Los Angeles, California, are meant to ease traffic backups. They also encourage public transit and offer a

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However, critics claim riders put pedestrians in danger by driving the scooters on sidewalks and ignoring traffic rules. Emergency rooms have reported a range of scooter-crash injuries.

The motorized scooters are called "dockless" because they can be picked up and dropped off anywhere. They can be rented with a smartphone.

Now, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention are studying the scooters to understand their health and safety risks. In the first study of its kind in the U.S., a team of CDC scientists arrived in Austin recently to investigate the conditions that lead to scooter crashes and how to prevent them. They're teaming up with Austin health and transportation officials.

The study will focus on emergency medical services calls and emergency room data related to scooter crashes reported over a 90-day period, said Dr. Philip Huang. He is medical director and health authority for Austin Public Health. The health department requested the CDC study.

### Figuring Out New Rules For Scooter Riders

The CDC will review the data and interview people involved in the crashes to determine how the crashes occurred and offer preventive measures, he said. That information could lead to new rules for scooter riders. The study's results will be made public in the spring.

"We realized we wanted to get a better handle of the magnitude of injuries and the factors associated with the injuries," Huang said. "It's so new, we really don't know very much about it."

Dockless scooters exploded onto city streets in 2016. They have multiplied in some cities as a cheap, easy-to-use transportation option. The electric scooters, from companies like Bird and Lime, are available to rent using apps on smartphones.

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In Austin, seven companies have licenses to operate 11,000 scooters around the city. In October, riders took 275,300 trips on the scooters, covering 264,300 miles, said a city report. In that month, the city reported only 14 scooter crashes with nine injuries and no fatalities, the report said.

The scooters offer a cheap travel alternative in cities like Austin, which is growing and struggling to ease massive car traffic, said Jason JonMichael. He is the Austin Transportation Department assistant director. Officials have been encouraged by rows of scooters left at bus and metrorail stations. It's a sign that riders are using the scooters to reach public transportation, he said.

### Enforcing Rules For Scooter Riders

That's key in a city like Austin, JonMichael said. It lacks a subway or metro system as robust as New York City or Chicago, he said.

"It's added essentially a full-on, New York-level transit line worth of service," JonMichael said. "It's given us the equivalent of high-capacity transit."

However, some people have complained of scooters zipping past them on sidewalks or going the wrong way on roads. At the University of Texas at Austin, or UT for short, dozens of students motor around on the scooters. UT officials recently set up a committee to review their rules related to scooters.

From September 1 through December 3, officials at University Health Services, a clinic for UT students, counted 110 scooter-related injuries. Those included bruises, cuts, head

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Another common complaint is clusters of scooters left on sidewalks or in front of businesses. Austin launched a pilot program in April that requires licenses and scooter limits for companies to operate in the city. However, few enforceable rules exist for riders.

Councilwoman Ann Kitchen said she acknowledges the scooters' benefits but said the parking complaints and safety concerns need to be addressed. The CDC study should help with that, she said.

### Scooter Craze Is Just Getting Started

"One of the key things the city has to figure out is where is it appropriate for scooters to be ridden," Kitchen said. "We're learning a lot now through this pilot."

Other cities wrestle with how to live with the scooters. San Francisco, California, issued a temporary ban and then limited the number of operating companies to two. Santa Monica, California, is experimenting with marking some street parking spaces for scooter parking. Other cities, such as Nashville, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., have tried similar approaches.

The scooter craze is showing many of the growing pains seen when ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft got started, said Susan Shaheen. She researches sustainable transportation.

A key difference, however, is the speed with which scooters have come on the scene and their widespread use, she said. Another difference is the speed with which cities are tackling the problem and sharing information with one another.

One sign that the scooters may be here to stay is that Uber bought Jump scooters, Shaheen said. Uber also is reportedly in talks to buy Bird, another scooter

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"It's almost like you have to look at a broader range of options to keep people moving, and happy," she said.

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Arts

## Fashion Week reveals wearable tech is — literally — in fashion

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Image 1: A model walks the runway wearing a Thunderfity x 360Fashion Network robotic dress at Fashion Week in New York City, September 6, 2019. Photo by Thomas Concordia/WireImage

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff  
Published: 09/20/2019 Word Count: 668

Technology and fashion often mix. New technology has improved clothing production and helped bring high fashion to many people. However, at New York City's Fashion Week 2019,

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September 14.

The robotic dresses were conceived with the help of a kit designed by Anina Trepte. She is a former model and founder of the 360Fashion Network, a company that specializes in fashion technology. Trepte wants designers to integrate technology into their work even if they cannot code themselves.

"I am on a mission to encourage other women to get into tech," Trepte said.

**Automated Clothing**

Designers Clare Tattersall and Azrael Yang used Trepte's kits to create six dresses. The robotic clothing was shown at a fashion week show organized by Melange, a movement promoting inclusion in fashion and art. The show was held in a church in the Harlem neighborhood of New York.

Tattersall is from Great Britain but lives in New York. She created one dress with large futuristic flower petals that open and close mechanically on their own, creating the perfect eye-catching party attire.

A second dress has a large silver hood that goes up and down with the click of a button.

The last is a fitting frock for today, with the #MeToo movement bringing increased attention to sexual harassment. The dress features bits of metal fastened to one shoulder. When hidden motion sensors detect someone who is too close, the metal rattles and shakes.

Yang, who is based in Beijing, China, took her inspiration from the ocean and seaweed. Her creations gently flow like waves, guided by sensors and environmental data.

Trepte was impressed with the dresses. "A phenomenal result," she said.

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fashion tech.

"All the designs and the tech on these clothes were made by women — and the men did the sewing. ha ha ha!" she said.

For Tattersall, the founder of New York-based fashion tech company ThunderLily, education is key.


"My goal is to get girls involved in math and technology, show them that technology is a creative tool," she said.

Tattersall teaches girls of all ages about wearable technology. She believes fashion tech could be especially important in the future in terms of improving our health and fitness.

**Wearable Tech On Display**

The robotic dresses were also shown at a separate exhibition in New York's Union Square, along with some of Trepte's own wearable tech. Trepte made jewelry that lights up. She also created wallets that charge cellphones and an "SOS" ring that sends a text and a GPS location to an emergency contact.

Also on display were kits to make gloves with LED lights or coats with heating. The show even had a robot that can prepare drinks. The machine is activated by wearable tech hidden in the sleeves of a jacket.



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image ©: sophia the first robot dressed 'fashion' week in new york city; photo by: thomas l. concanahan/retnaimage

A lifelike robot named Sophia was a special guest at both the Harlem show and the following Union Square exhibition. She was made by the company Hanson Robotics.

Her features and gestures are lifelike, right down to her eyelashes, creating an unnerving effect.

At the Melange show in Harlem, Sophia gave a speech about inclusion. On the fashion runway were models of all shapes and sizes, races and sexual orientations.

Rag & Bone joined the robotic fun in a different way. For its big return to New York Fashion Week after a three-year absence, the fashion company sent a giant robotic arm to film its runway show.

The images were shown live to the public on giant LED screens.

The robotic arm was connected to sensors capturing the models' movements. The creation was almost like a character, according to Aaron Duffy, who directed the robot for the show.

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