Bird and Lime scooters lead to bumps, bruises and broken bones for Baltimore riders

by Andrea K. McDanielsContact Reporter The Baltimore Sun <http://www.baltimoresun.com/health/bs-hs-scooter-injuries-20181026-story.html>

Speeding along on an electric scooter toward a concert last month, Alex Martin hit an uneven space in the sidewalk and fell over, landing hard on his right wrist.

After wearing a cast for several weeks, the 23-year-old is now scheduled for surgery to fix a broken bone and a possible torn ligament. And he’s over the scooter craze.

“I don’t think I will be riding in the city again,” he said.

The electric Bird and Lime scooters have become very popular since they arrived in Baltimore, with people taking [more than 250,000 rides in the first month and a half](http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-bird-lime-data-20181016-story.html) of the pilot (test) program. But some riders are discovering they can be hazardous.

It is hard to tell exactly how many people are getting hurt. The scooter companies should report injuries to the city, but have not. City transportation officials said many people might not tell the company if they get hurt. The scooter companies require people to report accidents to the local police, but many might not.

Hospitals aren’t recording the number of injuries, but some emergency room and orthopedic doctors said they have started to see an increase since the scooters came to town. Patients arrive with broken bones, bad bruises and scrapes. Some complain about concussion symptoms like headaches and dizziness after a crash.

“We have had a whole bunch of injuries,” said Dr. Babar Shafiq, an orthopedic trauma surgeon. “Most of them are ankles and knees. Both fractures and dislocations.”

Most of his patients have difficulty stopping. Riders hit a pothole or try to avoid hitting something in their pathway and can’t get off the scooter quickly enough. The scooters look fun and easy to ride, but take some skill, said the doctor, who also has seen collarbone and elbow fractures.

Dr. Brian J. Browne, who works in an emergency room, said he and his co-workers have treated several patients injured while operating scooters, including a 70-year-old woman who was thrown off after hitting an uneven spot in the pavement. She broke her thumb, wrist and elbow, and suffered cuts on her face.

Lime and Bird tell people they should wear a helmet when they register to use the service on the companies’ apps. The companies do not provide the helmets and few people bring their own. The companies did not return several messages about injuries.

Riders also must have a driver’s license and be 18 years of age. Lime warns riders not to perform stunts on the scooters, while Bird tells riders to keep both feet on the vehicle at all times. When customers sign up, they agree to a waiver freeing the companies of injury liability.

Nya Dobbs wasn’t wearing a helmet when she hit a pothole while riding for fun with a friend one Saturday afternoon last month. She fell and landed on her hip. Doctors had to drain blood from a hematoma. She agreed that the scooter companies warn users to ride safely and that she knows there is the potential for accidents. “Bird and Lime suggest wearing a helmet and other safety precautions when you sign up. Accidents happen. Riders just need to be pay attebtuib, which can be hard.”

The city’s Department of Transportation is planning a social media campaign about how to ride scooters safely. They are also thinking of better ways to monitor accidents and evaluate other areas of the program. The scooter program is a trial that runs through February and changes could be made to the program if it becomes permanent.

Cities around the country are struggling with the legalities of scooter programs and how to regulate them. It is unclear if the cities could be responsible for injuries sustained by residents. State law requires riders under 16 to wear helmets.

Many cities have sued the companies to stop them from putting scooters on their streets. A class action lawsuit filed in California for injuries of people who have been hit by the scooters.

Dr. Keith Segalman, a surgeon with The Curtis National Hand Center at MedStar Union Memorial Hospital who treated Martin, said riders should probably wear knee and wrist guards along with helmets. He has seen wrist injuries because riders put out their hands when they fall and hit the ground.