Airbag Injuries Are Common in Pennsylvania Car Accidents

An attorney can help you seek maximum compensation for your medical bills

Airbags have become a standard safety feature in modern vehicles, designed to protect occupants during collisions. These devices deploy rapidly in the event of a crash and create a cushion between vehicle occupants and a vehicle's hard surfaces.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), airbags have saved over 50,000 lives over the course of 30 years. However, when deployed in a crash, they can also cause unexpected health issues that persist long after a car accident.

What happens when an airbag deploys?

When a car's sensors detect a collision, they trigger the airbag system. Within milliseconds, a chemical reaction produces nitrogen gas, which inflates the airbag at speeds up to 200 mph.

This rapid deployment can cause immediate physical trauma to occupants, including bruises, burns, and even fractures. Additionally, the deployment releases a fine powder and potentially harmful chemicals into the vehicle's cabin.

The force of an airbag deployment can feel like a punch to the face or chest. While this impact is designed to be less severe than hitting the steering wheel or dashboard, it can still cause significant trauma and serious injuries.

How can airbag deployment affect your physical health in the long term?

The physical consequences of airbag deployment can extend far beyond the immediate aftermath of a car accident. Below are some of the potential long-term health issues linked to airbag deployment:

Musculoskeletal problems and chronic pain

Airbag deployment can lead to chronic musculoskeletal issues, which involve injuries to the muscles, bones, tendons, ligaments, and joints.

Whiplash is one of the most common long-term airbag-related injuries. The force of deployment can cause the head to whip back and forth rapidly, which places strain on the soft tissue in the neck.

Other soft tissue injuries are also common with airbag deployment. Some people experience persistent shoulder and arm problems due to the impact or awkward positioning during deployment.

Respiratory issues and breathing problems

The deployment of airbags in a vehicle collision releases a mixture of chemicals that decompose into nitrogen gas to inflate the airbag. This process also produces other byproducts, including sodium hydroxide and various particulates.

When these chemicals are forcefully expelled into the vehicle's cabin, they can be inhaled by occupants and potentially cause both immediate and long-term respiratory issues. The fine dust and chemical residue can irritate the delicate tissues of the lungs and airways. This can lead to inflammation, coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath.

In some cases, this exposure triggers an immune response similar to asthma, such as bronchial hyperreactivity and persistent respiratory symptoms. More severely, some crash victims may develop chemical pneumonitis, where the lung tissue becomes inflamed due to chemical exposure.

Hearing impairment

The deployment of an airbag in a collision produces an extremely loud and sudden noise. This explosive sound can reach an astounding 170 decibels. To put this in perspective, the threshold for immediate hearing damage is around 120 decibels, and prolonged exposure to sounds above 85 decibels can cause gradual hearing loss.

The intensity of an airbag deployment sound far exceeds these levels, even for a very brief moment. This sudden, intense acoustic trauma can overwhelm the delicate structures of the inner ear and potentially cause immediate damage, such as tinnitus, which is a ringing or buzzing in the ears.

In more severe cases, the sound can lead to permanent hearing loss by damaging or destroying the hair cells in the cochlea, which convert sound waves into electrical signals that the brain interprets as sound.

Vision problems

Vision problems resulting from airbag deployment can range from temporary discomfort to severe, long-lasting visual impairment. When an airbag inflates at high speed, it can cause direct trauma to the eyes or introduce irritants that damage the ocular surface.

Common injuries include corneal abrasions, where the surface of the eye is scratched, leading to pain, redness, and light sensitivity. More serious injuries may include chemical burns from the gases released during deployment and blunt force trauma causing hyphema (bleeding in the eye) or retinal detachment.

What factors influence the severity of long-term health consequences?

Several factors can affect the likelihood and severity of long-term health issues following airbag deployment, including:

- **Crash severity**: Generally, more severe accidents increase the risk of long-term health problems.
- **Occupant position**: Your position relative to the airbag at the time of deployment can significantly impact the type and severity of injuries.

What should I do after airbag deployment during a crash?

The first thing you should do is do a quick assessment of yourself and your passengers for injuries. Then, call emergency services immediately. If possible, move to a location where you're out of the line of traffic and call the police to report the car accident.

While waiting for the police to arrive at the crash scene, exchange contact and insurance information with the other party involved. Avoid making statements about the car accident or arguing about fault. Let the police perform an initial assessment and create an official crash report first.

Take photos of the crash scene if you can, including vehicle damage, positions, and any visible injuries. If any witnesses are at the scene, take down their contact information and ask if they caught the incident on a dashcam or another video device. After the police examine the crash scene, inquire how and where to obtain a copy of the police report.

Be sure to get a thorough medical evaluation, even if you feel fine and aren't experiencing any noticeable symptoms. Some injuries, including those from airbag deployment, may be masked by adrenaline. A medical evaluation and diagnosis help you begin treating your injury early and establish an official link to your car accident.

How do I seek compensation after a car accident?

Pennsylvania is "choice no-fault" state for car accidents. This means you can seek damages from your personal injury protection (PIP) coverage. However, if your damages exceed your PIP policy limit, you must seek compensation from the at-fault driver's insurance company. It's in your interest to seek the help of an experienced Pittsburgh car accident lawyer at Romanow Law Group.

If you go it alone, the insurance companies may take advantage of you. Insurance adjusters are notorious for shifting blame or pressuring crash victims into accepting lowball settlement offers that only cover a fraction of the victim's damages, the legal term for financial losses due to an accident. Let our Pittsburgh attorneys protect your rights and demand the compensation you're entitled to for your losses.

Your recovery is our priority. Contact us online or call our Pittsburgh law office today for a free consultation. Let our legal team protect your rights and help you fight for the compensation you deserve.