By Rob McCarthy

To no one’s surprise, electric scooters that showed up last year in South Bay cities before being banned are sending people to hospital emergency rooms with an assortment of injuries. And it’s not only the riders who get scrapes, bruises and broken bones. The walking wounded include bystanders, too -- some of whom are fighting back against the trendy mode of transportation.

Recent developments have slowed the introduction of the sleek scooters from Bird and Lime into Southern California. More cities have banned them for now, preferring to take a wait-and-see approach to how the introduction of the trendy mode of transportation.

The UCLA research team did some firsthand observation of scooter traffic in Santa Monica and reported that riders weren’t wearing helmets 93 percent of the time. Protection against head injuries is clearly needed if the personal transportation device offered by Bird and Lime is going to coexist with vehicle traffic. The 249 injury cases present a small sample, yet the plastic surgeons at one Santa Monica emergency room have seen what happens when a rider is thrown to the pavement.

One-third of those patients were taken to UCLA hospitals in Santa Monica or Westwood in an ambulance over a one-year period that lasted through September last year. The work done at UCLA is a foray into a public health initiative that hasn’t been analyzed and reported until now.

One of the typical scooter-related injuries to the head is not a pretty sight, according to Dr. Wally Ghurabi, medical director of the emergency departments at UCLA Medical Center in Santa Monica. His surgeons have spent hours picking asphalt out of facial wounds. “You can break your face, break your nose, break your facial bones, break your skull and bleed inside your skull,” Ghurabi warns about the demonstrated risks to riders.

Patients who made emergency-room visits or were treated for scooter crashes had a huge number of head injuries, in the UCLA analysis. Head trauma put 40 percent of those patients in the hospital emergency rooms with an assortment of injuries. The main cause of those injuries was a fall. In 80 percent of the reported cases, the rider tumbled and sustained some injury. Fractures and head injuries are commonly reported until now.

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