



Teen Drivers: Fact Sheet

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, accounting for more than one in three deaths in this age group.¹ In 2007, eleven teens ages 16 to 19 died every day from motor vehicle injuries.

How big is the problem, and what are the costs?

In 2007, more than 4,200 teens in the United States aged 15–19 were killed and almost 400,000 were treated in emergency departments for injuries suffered in motor-vehicle crashes.¹

Young people ages 15-24 represent only 14% of the U.S. population. However, they account for 30% (\$19 billion) of the total costs of motor vehicle injuries among males and 28% (\$7 billion) of the total costs of motor vehicle injuries among females.²

Who is most at risk?

The risk of motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16- to 19-year-olds than among any other age group. In fact, per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are four times more likely than older drivers to crash.³

Among teen drivers, those at especially high risk for motor vehicle crashes are:

- **Males:** In 2005, the motor vehicle death rate for male drivers and passengers ages 16 to 19 was more than one and a half times that of their female counterparts.¹
- **Teens driving with teen passengers:** The presence of teen passengers increases the crash risk of unsupervised teen drivers. This risk increases with the number of teen passengers.⁴
- **Newly licensed teens:** Crash risk is particularly high during the first year that teenagers are eligible to drive.³

What are the major risk factors?

- Teens are more likely than older drivers to underestimate dangerous situations or not be able to recognize hazardous situations.⁵
- Teens are more likely than older drivers to speed and allow shorter headways (the distance from the front of one vehicle to the front of the next). The presence of male teenage passengers increases the likelihood of this risky driving behavior.⁶
- Among male drivers between 15 and 20 years of age who were involved in fatal crashes in 2005, 38% were speeding at the time of the crash and 24% had been drinking.^{7,8}
- Compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. In 2005, 10% of high school students reported they rarely or never wear seat belts when riding with someone else.⁹ In a national survey of seat belt use among high school students:

Male high school students (12.5%) were more likely than female students (7.8%) to rarely or never wear seat belts.⁹

African-American students (13.4%) and Hispanic students (10.6%) were more likely

than white students (9.4%) to rarely or never wear seat belts.⁹

- At all levels of blood alcohol concentration (BAC), the risk of involvement in a motor vehicle crash is greater for teens than for older drivers.³
- In 2005, 23% of drivers ages 15 to 20 who died in motor vehicle crashes had a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or higher.⁸
- In a national survey conducted in 2005, nearly three out of ten teens reported that, within the previous month, they had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol. One in ten reported having driven after drinking alcohol within the same one-month period.⁹
- In 2005, three out of four teen drivers killed in motor vehicle crashes after drinking and driving were not wearing a seat belt.⁹
- In 2005, half of teen deaths from motor vehicle crashes occurred between 3 p.m. and midnight and 54% occurred on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.³

How can motor vehicle injuries be prevented?

There are proven methods to helping teens become safer drivers. Research suggests that the most comprehensive graduated drivers licensing (GDL) programs are associated with reductions of 38% and 40% in fatal and injury crashes, respectively, among 16-year-old drivers.¹

Graduated driver licensing (GDL) systems (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/duip/spotlite/GradDrvLic.htm>) are designed to delay full licensure while allowing teens to get their initial driving experience under low-risk conditions. For more information about GDL systems, see Teens Behind the Wheel: Graduated Drivers Licensing (/MotorVehicleSafety/Teen_Drivers/Teens_Behind_Wheel.html).

When parents know their state's GDL laws, they can help enforce the laws and, in effect, help keep their teen drivers safe.

Resources

Graduated Drivers Licensing Toolkit (<http://www.healthystates.csg.org/NR/rdonlyres/72C6F412-47D3-4433-BA2A-3F72C0B4C885/0/gdltoolkit.pdf>) (order a copy online (<http://www.cdc.gov/pubs/ncipc.aspx>).

In this Healthy States tool kit, users can find out more about GDL systems, why GDL laws are needed, and what state legislators can do to improve state GDL laws.

Graduated Drivers Licensing Fact Sheets (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/00224375>) (from the 2007 International Symposium on Novice Teen Driving: GDL and Beyond)

The National Safety Council, with sponsorship from the CDC, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the GEICO Foundation, Nationwide Insurance, General Motors Corporation, and State Farm Insurance, held the second International Symposium on Novice Teen Driving in February 2007. These fact sheets summarize the current scientific findings on Graduated Driver Licensing that were presented at the Symposium in February. Information in the fact sheets is based on papers written by Symposium presenters and published in the April 2007 GDL Special Issue of the *Journal of Safety Research*.

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/index.html>)

This online guide offers recommendations about motor vehicle injury prevention issued by the Task Force on Community Preventive Services.

References

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⁶ Simons-Morton B, Lerner N, Singer J. The observed effects of teenage passengers on the risky driving behavior of teenage drivers. Accident Analysis and Prevention

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⁸ National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Dept. of Transportation (US). Traffic safety facts 2005: young drivers. Washington (DC): NHTSA; 2006b [cited 2008 March 28]. Available from: URL: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov> (<http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov>) .

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