

Teen Drivers: Fact Sheet

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens.¹ In 2010, seven teens ages 16 to 19 died every day from motor vehicle injuries. Per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are three times more likely than drivers aged 20 and older to be in a fatal crash.² Fortunately, teen motor vehicle crashes are preventable, and proven strategies can improve the safety of young drivers on the road.

How big is the problem?

In 2010, about 2,700 teens in the United States aged 16–19 were killed and almost 282,000 were treated and released from 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.³

In 2010, the motor vehicle death rate for male drivers and passengers ages 16 to 19 was almost two times that of their female counterparts.

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 three times more likely than drivers aged 20 and older to be in a fatal crash.²

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

- **Males:** In 2010, the motor vehicle death rate for male drivers and passengers ages 16 to 19 was almost two 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 months of licensure.^{5,6}

What factors put teen drivers at risk?

- Teens are more likely than older drivers to underestimate dangerous situations or not be able to recognize hazardous situations.⁷
- 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.⁸
- Among male drivers between 15 and 20 years of age who were involved in fatal crashes in 2010, 39% were speeding at the time of the crash⁹ and 25% had been drinking.¹⁰
- Compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. In 2011, only 54% of high school students reported they always wear seat belts when riding with someone else.¹¹

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- 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.¹²
- In 2010, 22% of drivers aged 15 to 20 involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes were drinking.¹⁰
- In a national survey conducted in 2011, 24% of teens reported that, within the previous month, they had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol and 8% reported having driven after drinking alcohol within the same one-month period.¹³
- In 2010, 56% of drivers aged 15 to 20 were killed in motor vehicle crashes after drinking and driving were not wearing a seat belt.¹⁰
- In 2010, half of teen deaths from motor vehicle crashes occurred between 3 p.m. and midnight and 55% occurred on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.²

How can deaths and injuries resulting from crashes involving teen drivers 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.¹⁴

Graduated driver licensing (GDL) systems are designed to delay full licensure while allowing teens to get their initial driving experience under low-risk conditions.

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](#) ([order a copy online](#))

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 Driver Licensing Research, 2010-Present](#)

This is the latest in a series of reviews of research on graduated driver licensing (GDL) published in the *Journal of Safety Research*, covering the period January 1, 2010-June 1, 2012 and works in progress.

[Graduated Drivers Licensing Fact Sheets](#) (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](#)

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

[Parents Are The Key to Safe Teen Drivers](#)

Through the "Parents Are the Key" campaign, CDC offers parents tools and proven steps for reducing teen driving injuries and deaths. Businesses and other groups can also help keep young drivers safe by spreading campaign message through posters, fact sheets, social media tools, and more.

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Page last reviewed: October 2, 2012

- Page last updated: October 2, 2012

- Content source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) , [National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#) ,
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