

KEEP TEENAGERS SAFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

GETTING A CELL PHONE AND LEARNING TO DRIVE ARE RITES OF PASSAGE FOR TODAY'S TEENAGERS. BUT LIKE DRINKING AND DRIVING, TEENS WHO TALK ON THE PHONE WHILE DRIVING RISK HARMING THEMSELVES AND OTHERS.



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Research shows that driving while using a cell phone can pose a serious cognitive distraction and degrade driver performance. This holds true whether the cell phone is hand-held or hands-free. Although the data are insufficient to quantify crashes caused by cell phone use specifically, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that driver distraction from all sources contributes to 25 percent of all police-reported traffic crashes.

As a general rule, drivers should make every effort to move to a safe place off the road before using a cell phone. However, in emergency

situations, drivers must use their judgment regarding the urgency of the situation and the necessity to use a cell phone while driving.

Drowsy Driving Also Poses a Risk

Cell phones are not the only cause of driver distraction. Drowsiness, particularly when combined with alcohol, results in significant decreases in alertness and performance. Young people ages 16 to 29, especially males, are at particular risk.

Generally speaking, any activity that draws a driver's attention from the primary task of driving can increase the risk of automobile accidents. Manipulating the radio or CD player, reaching for objects inside the vehicle and eating and drinking also have been implicated in crashes. Because teen drivers are particularly vulnerable to accidents caused by distraction, they should be very careful to avoid doing anything other than driving when behind the wheel.

Keep Teen Drivers Safe

Strategy One: *Wear Safety Belts*

Most teens support primary enforcement of safety belt laws, which allow law enforcement officers to stop a vehicle and issue a citation when the officer observes an unbelted driver or passenger. In a nationwide survey conducted in 2003, 64% of young people aged 16 to 20 voiced their support for primary enforcement laws.

Strategy Two: *Graduated Licensing*

Many jurisdictions in the United States have adopted Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL), a system designed to delay full licensure while beginners obtain their initial experience under lower-risk conditions. Graduated licensing has three stages:

- 1) a minimum supervised learner's period;
- 2) an intermediate license; and
- 3) a full-privilege driver's license after successful completion of the first two stages.

The intermediate license stage generally includes:

- passing a behind-the-wheel road test;
- zero alcohol while driving;
- all occupants must wear seat belts;
- supervised night driving;
- remaining violation and crash free at least 12 months;
- completing advanced driver education;
- license distinctive from a regular license; and
- supervised practice.

For more information on safety belts and graduated licensing, visit www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/newdriver/TeenBeltUse/index.htm

Teenage Driving Fatality Facts

- In 2003, young drivers between the ages of 15 and 20 accounted for 6.3 percent (12.4 million) of the total number of licensed drivers in the United States.
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds (based on 2002 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics).
- In 2004, 7,898 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes.
- In 2004, 3,620 drivers aged 15 to 20 were killed, and an additional 303,000 injured, in motor vehicle crashes.
- Driver fatalities for this age group increased by 5 percent between 1994 and 2004.
- For young males, driver fatalities rose by 1 percent, compared with a 15 percent increase for young females.

This handout is brought to you by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.