

# Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

Volume 100, Issue 62

September 2009

## Intoxicated Teen Driver Charged with Manslaughter

An 18-year-old man has been charged with intoxication manslaughter after the death of a front-seat passenger in a rollover crash. The teen's blood-alcohol level was 0.23 when it was tested at the hospital after the crash.

Source: *Chron.com* ♦

## Lessons Learned

Teens are at far greater risk of death in an alcohol-related crash than the overall population, despite the fact they cannot legally purchase or publicly possess alcohol in any state (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).

Most of those killed in alcohol-related crashes involving teen drivers are the young drivers themselves and their passengers.

Violators of underage drinking laws often face a trip to jail, the loss of their driver's license, and dozens of

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other unanticipated expenses including attorney fees, court costs, and other fines. Plus, there is the added embarrassment, humiliation, and potential loss and consequence related to academic eligibility, college acceptance, scholarship awards, and more.

Make sure your teen understands:

- Alcohol is not actually digested; it's absorbed directly through the lining of the stomach into the bloodstream. This is why the body feels the effect so quickly.
- Alcohol has its first and greatest effect on the parts of the brain that control judgment and reasoning, the most critical skills needed by drivers. Physical abilities become impaired soon after.
- A driver affected by alcohol has a decreased ability to reason clearly and to make sound judgments. However, the driver may feel as though thinking and judging abilities are sharper and quicker than usual.
- Alcohol quickly diminishes the ability to concentrate, which greatly increases a driver's level of risk. A person's driving ability can be reduced after only one drink.
- The muscular reactions of a driver who has been drinking can become slow and clumsy. Steering and braking movements can become uncoordinated. The driver might over-steer, brake late or not brake at all. The driver might not be able to negotiate turns properly and safely.

Make sure your teen knows that she or he can always call you for a ride, whether the teen is intoxicated or is faced with the prospect of riding with a driver who has been drinking.

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## Teen Drives Car into House

A 15-year-old boy was charged with careless driving, driving without a license, having no insurance, and not wearing a seat belt after slamming the car he was driving into a house, causing \$80,000 in damage and leaving a family homeless. The family was not home at the time of the crash; the teen escaped with minor injuries.

Source: *Gainesville.com* ♦

## Lessons Learned: Support for GDL Laws

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), specific contributors to higher crash rates for teens include:

- Lack of driving experience and skills: Compared with crashes of older drivers, those of 16-year-olds more often involve driver error
- A propensity towards risk taking behavior and poor decision-making
- Driving at night: Per mile driven, the nighttime fatal crash rate for 16-year-old drivers is twice as high as during daytime hours
- Distraction from teenage passengers: Fatal crashes involving 16-year-old drivers are more likely to take place when other teens are in the vehicle, and the risk increases with every additional passenger
- Speeding: Sixteen-year old drivers have a higher rate of crashes in which excessive speed is a contributing factor

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) programs help young drivers get driving experience progressively while minimizing risk, beginning with a restricted permit and eventually leading to full licensure. Most programs include three stages:

- Learner Stage: Supervised driving, ending with a road test
- Intermediate Stage: Limiting unsupervised driving in high-risk circumstances
- Full Privilege Stage: A regular driver's license

Provisions of graduated licensing laws may include:

- Required hours of adult supervision during the learner stage
- Restrictions on late-night driving
- Restrictions on driving with teen passengers
- Seat belt requirements for drivers and passengers

- Restrictions on cellular phone use
- Prohibiting the driver from moving up to the next level due to traffic violations

GDL laws in most of the states that have them do not comply with all of the recommendations of the NHTSA; still, there has been an overall decrease in fatal crashes nationally since GDL laws began to be implemented. In 2006, 7,463 drivers who were 15 to 20 years old were involved in fatal crashes - an eight percent decrease from 8,074 involved in 1996. Individually, states with GDL laws also show improvement:

- California: A five percent decrease in crashes for 16- and 17-year-old drivers
- Florida: A nine percent decrease in crashes for 16- and 17-year old drivers
- Michigan: A 26% decrease in crashes for 16-year-old drivers
- North Carolina: A 25% decrease in crashes for 16-year-old drivers
- Oregon: A 29% decrease in crashes for 16-year-old drivers and a 16% decrease in crashes for 17-year-old drivers

NHTSA research has also found that the most comprehensive GDL programs are associated with the greatest decrease in crash rates for teen drivers.

It is more difficult to evaluate the individual components of GDL laws because of the overlap of restrictions, but the NHTSA has conducted some research in this area. An analysis of the passenger restriction laws in California, Massachusetts, and Virginia indicated that there were 740, 173, and 454 fewer 16-year-old involved in crashes per year, respectively. A different study found that states with nighttime driving restrictions for teen drivers show decreases in crashes of up to 60% during the restricted hours.

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## Teens Dies in Car Crash after Passing Friends' Cars

An 18-year-old man died in a rollover crash when he lost control of his vehicle after passing the vehicles of two friends. The teen was passing in a legal passing zone.

Source: *WTEN.com* ♦

## Lessons Learned

### Tips for Passing Safely:

- Stay a safe distance behind the vehicle you want to pass. The closer you get to the vehicle you want to pass, the less you can see ahead. This is especially true when passing trucks, trailers, and other large vehicles.
- Before you pull out to pass, check your blind spots and make sure that you have plenty of time and room to pass.
- On a two-lane road, tap your horn, or at night blink your headlights to let the other driver know you are passing.
- Give your signal before you move into the left lane.
- Do not return to the right side of the road until you can see the tires of the vehicle you passed in your rearview mirror.
- You must return to the right side of the road before coming within 200 feet of any vehicle coming from the opposite direction.
- Passing on the right is only legal when there are two or more lanes of traffic moving in the same direction or the vehicle you are passing is making a left turn. Pulling off the roadway to pass on the right is against the law.

### Tips on Being Passed:

- The driver of the car being passed must not increase speed until the pass is complete.
- Help other drivers pass you safely. Move to the right side of your lane to give them more room and a better view of the road ahead.

### When You May Not Pass:

You may not pass on a two-lane road with traffic moving in opposite directions under these conditions:

- Where you see a **"DO NOT PASS"** or **"NO PASSING ZONE"** sign. Where a solid yellow line is painted on your side of the center line.
- On hills or curves and at intersections.
- Within 100 feet of a bridge, viaduct, tunnel, or railroad crossing.

Violators may be arrested or issued a ticket.

Source: *Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles* ♦

## Tips for Teens: Safe Labor Day Driving

Though teens cannot legally celebrate Labor Day with alcohol, teen drivers still have to contend with intoxicated drivers on the road. Summer is always a dangerous time for teen drivers; they are at particular risk on holiday weekends.

Teens typically want to spend time with friends during holiday weekends, so parents need to ensure that their teens will be closely supervised by adults who will prevent the teens from having access to alcohol. Risk factors for teens on the road during holiday weekends include:

- Due to their limited driving experience, teens often have difficulty handling emergency situations; for example, they might try to pass a driver who keeps drifting into their lane.
- Teens may have trouble recognizing when other drivers might be impaired and neglect to allow an adequate space cushion between their vehicle and the vehicles of those drivers.
- Teens often have poor impulse control, which could lead them into playing traffic games with aggressive or impaired drivers, such as racing from one traffic light to another.

Teens can use defensive driving techniques for safe holiday driving:

- Always wear your safety belt. This is your best defense against impaired drivers.
- Obey the speed limit. Driving too fast means drivers have less space to respond to hazards.
- Avoid being distracted from watching the road by noisy passengers, loud music, or using a cell phone.
- Maintain an adequate space cushion on all sides between your vehicle and other vehicles. If you notice someone driving erratically, increase your space cushion.
- Observe the behavior of other drivers, but keep your eyes moving; don't get so distracted that you miss another hazard.

Teen drivers can report possible impaired drivers to local law enforcement, but always must pull off the road and stop before using a cell phone.

Source: *SafeDriver.com* ♦



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## The Most Dangerous US Cities for Teen Drivers

Although teens are at greater risk of injury or death in motor vehicle collisions than nearly every other age group no matter what part of the country they're in, where teens live can also have an impact on their risk, according to separate studies conducted by Allstate Insurance Company and Reader's Digest. Motor vehicle crashes are the number one killer of American teens, and each year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), more than 5,000 people aged 16-20 are killed in passenger vehicle crashes; one study showed that these crashes are a particularly serious problem in Florida.

The Allstate study used federal crash statistics, company claims data on teen motor vehicle crashes, and statistics from the US Census Bureau to list the ten most dangerous cities from the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. The results revealed that the most risky cities for teens are located in the South, with the top three in Florida. Of the top 50 cities in the country for teen fatality crashes, Tampa/St. Petersburg/Clearwater, Orlando/Kissimmee, and Jacksonville rank number one, two and three, respectively.

The Reader's Digest study uses a different classification method, ranking all 50 states based on existing Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL), safety belt, and Driving Under the Influence (DUI) laws. The report listed Alaska, California and Delaware as the top three, and North Dakota, Mississippi and Arkansas as three of the worst. Florida is categorized as "Fair," the next-to-lowest ranking. Interestingly, California cities also scored high in the Allstate study: Numbers one, two and four were San Francisco/Oakland, San Jose, and Los Angeles.

Factors that contribute to teen motor vehicle crashes include:

- Speeding/driving too fast for conditions
- Driver distraction, including cell phone use and dealing with passengers
- Inexperience
- Driving at night
- Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs (including prescription and over-the-counter drugs)

Teens also often neglect to wear their seat belts, increasing the risk of serious injury or death in a crash. An observational study by the Utah Department of Health found that the teen seat belt

use rate falls when other high-risk factors are present, such as when teens drive under the influence of alcohol, drive at night, have multiple teen passengers, or are driving without a [driver's license](#).

The risk factors listed above, including seat belt requirements, are addressed by GDL laws in many states. GDL laws set standards that underage drivers must meet before proceeding from one stage of licensure to the next.

In the 1980s, 90% of high schools taught driver's education; in 2009, only 20% do. This means that teens get the majority of their driver education from their parents and are subject only to state requirements when becoming licensed, making GDL laws of ever-increasing importance in lowering teen crash rates.

While a national model for GDL laws has existed since the mid-1990s, no state follows all of the requirements. To show the disparities among states, The National Safety Commission (TNSC) [analyzed the GDL laws](#) in four states: California, Florida, Mississippi, and North Dakota. The study showed that:

- In California, the minimum age for a learner's permit is 15 years, six months; in Florida and Mississippi, the minimum age is 15. The minimum age in North Dakota is 14.
- While California and Florida each require 50 hours of practice driving with a parent or guardian in the learner's permit stage, 10 hours of which must be at night, neither Mississippi nor North Dakota require parental certification of any driving practice hours.
- North Dakota does not have any passenger or nighttime restrictions, and Florida and Mississippi have only nighttime restrictions. California's passenger restriction is that for the first 12 months, the restricted driver may have no passengers younger than 20, with limited exceptions for immediate family.

The Reader's Digest study indicated that stricter GDL laws typically result in lower teen fatality rates, and a study by Johns Hopkins University for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that comprehensive GDL laws decrease fatalities among 16-year-old drivers by 38 percent.

However, TNSC points out that parents must actively participate in their teens' driver education by [enforcing GDL laws as house rules](#), rather than leaving the issue to law enforcement. The possibility of legal consequences for teens who don't abide by their state's GDL laws should serve as support for parental restrictions, not take the place of them.

*Source: NationalSafetyCommission.com* ♦