

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

Volume 102, Issue 64

November 2009

Teen Killed In Crash Wasn't Wearing a Seat Belt

A 16 year old girl riding with two boys was killed when their car was involved in a collision. Investigators say that she wasn't wearing a seat belt at the time of the crash. The two boys who were in the car with her were injured; one was listed in critical condition while the other was treated and released from the hospital.

Source: *Heraldonline.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Details of this crash were unavailable so it isn't yet known who was at fault but, regardless of where the fault lies; there is a lesson that can be drawn from this collision.

The teens who died wasn't wearing a seatbelt. Two other companions in the car were injured but survived the crash. The fact that there were survivors leaves open the possibility that this teen might have

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Published by the National Safety Commission
for Teens and their Parents



survived had a seat belt been worn. Seat belts are the primary life saving device in a motor vehicle but, unfortunately, many people have still not gotten that word.

There are a lot of reasons people have for not wearing seat belts. One of the reasons commonly heard is "I had a "friend" who was told that he/she would have been killed if they had been wearing a seat belt". This is basically an urban legend; one of those stories you always hear from someone else but that can never be traced back to its origin. It would be difficult to find an auto safety expert who wouldn't recommend wearing a seat belt in all situations. Another problem with this excuse is that it requires that you be in a very specific type of crash with events leading up to and during the crash occurring in a specific order. That is highly unlikely. When we get into a car, there is no way to predict the type of collision in which we could possibly be involved. We have to be prepared for any type of collision.

Other excuses include; "it's too uncomfortable", "I'd rather be thrown clear in a crash" or "I have an airbag". As far as comfort goes, consider the alternatives; what is more uncomfortable, a seat belt or crashing through a windshield? Being thrown clear means hitting the concrete at the same speed the car was traveling at the time of the crash. No matter how severe a crash, you are always safer remaining inside the vehicle. Safe operation of the airbag depends on the passenger being belted in and, remember, the airbag only works if the airbag sensors are directly hit.

There is no guarantee that wearing a seat belt will always save your life or prevent injury but your chances of surviving a crash increase by up to 55 percent if you do.

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Teen Dies after Being Ejected from Trunk

A 14 year old girl, riding in the open trunk of a vehicle was killed after being ejected in a crash that also injured six others; one critically.

Source: lfpres.com ♦

Lessons Learned

This is one of several crashes in the past six months that involved teens packing cars with more passengers than they are designed to hold. This crash involved 7 teens packed into a small Kia sedan, with two riding in the open trunk. These crashes also had one more thing in common; speed.

Investigators in this crash are looking into reports that the 17 year old driver in this crash was racing another car filled with 5 teens. One passenger reported to the police that the two cars were traveling at more than 80 mph when the driver of the Kia, while attempting to pass, struck the other vehicle and went out of control crashing into the trees by the side of the road.

So few drivers seem to understand the physics involved in driving and the impact those physical laws have on the vehicle's performance. As a car's speed increases, the aerodynamic forces on the vehicle tend to make the rear of the vehicle rise; reducing the car's contact with the road surface. Steering wheels and brakes have little impact if the car's tires are not in full contact with the road. That is why the tire's contact with the road is considered to be the primary control device on a vehicle. Race cars, designed to travel at very high speeds, have an airfoil (an upside down wing) to push the rear of the vehicle down and increase the rear tires contact with the road.

As the speed of these vehicles increased, the driver of the smaller car probably experienced less control over the vehicle. When the vehicles made contact, the kinetic forces involved could easily send the smaller vehicle out of control. The other vehicle, which was significantly larger, was able to stay on the road.

The weight and speed of the vehicle determines the crash forces. The car involved in this crash weighs approximately 2500 pounds. Assuming that the car slowed to a speed of approximately 40 mph as it entered the trees, this 2500 lb vehicle would experience a crash force of more than 133,807 lbs.

The unrestrained passengers will be thrown from the vehicle at the same speed the vehicle was traveling when they departed the car. The occupants of a car are always safer when securely restrained inside the

vehicle during a crash. That is why seat belt use is so critical.

Graduated Driving Laws (GDLs) in most states limit the number of other teens a novice driver can have in the vehicle. Many of those states limit the number of teen age passengers to one until the driver reaches 18 years of age. This is done for a very good reason. Research shows that the more passengers there are in a car, the greater the distractions on the driver. Teens, with their active social life, can be more distracting than most. Young men also often feel the need to show off and, unfortunately, they often make the poor choice of showing off by driving recklessly. The combination of a car packed with teens and a driver's desire to show off can have disastrous consequences.

The drivers of both of these vehicles are facing numerous criminal charges including dangerous driving including death and criminal negligence including death. If convicted they may be facing prison terms but there is no way they can ever repay the cost of the life lost in this collision.

The teens involved in this crash were returning from a party at a teen club. The collision occurred at approximately 2:50 in the morning.

Parents need to ensure, when their teens go out, how they will be traveling and with whom. Even if your state does not have a GDL limiting the number of passengers a teen can carry, you can impose your own limits. Opening a dialogue with your teen and discussing why you are imposing limits is critical. Teens should also have no doubt as to the consequences of disobeying the limits. Sitting down together and creating a [Parent-Teen Driving Contract](#) with your teen can help you start the dialogue and come to an agreement on the limits and consequences.

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Teen Death Rates Decline In States With Strong Graduated Driver License Laws

"New Jersey's new teen driving laws have helped reduce the number of youngsters killed in car crashes for the third consecutive year."

Source: [nj.com](#) ♦

"Secretary of State Jesse White announced today that teen driving deaths in Illinois dropped by more than 50 percent since Illinois' nationally heralded Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) law took effect in 2008."

Source: [qconline.com](#) ♦

Lessons Learned

[A 2006 study by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#) that showed Graduated Driver License Laws (GDLs) reduced teen death rates by an average of 11% has been backed up by at least two states that have shown a significant decline in their teen fatality rate after enactment of tough new GDLs.

New Jersey's strong GDL laws will become even stronger with new GDL regulations as a result of recommendations by the [Teen Driver Study Commission](#). The new laws or regulations are:

- No plea bargains for GDL holders (teens can't plea bargain away points for traffic violations). Teens who accumulate 3 or more points, must attend a 4-hour MVC Probationary Driver Program and be monitored for 12 months. Any accumulation of points during the monitoring period will result in a 90 day license suspension.
- Use of a decal on the vehicle to identify drivers who hold a learner's permit or provisional license.
- 11 PM curfew for all drivers under the age of 21 who hold a permit or provisional license.
- Limit of passengers to just one - regardless of family affiliation.

The Illinois Secretary of State introduced figures that showed a 53% drop in teen deaths between 2007 and the first 9 months of 2009.

[Illinois sanctions](#) on drivers during the Initial Licensing Phase include:

- Two moving violation convictions occurring within a 24-month period will result in a minimum one-month driver's license suspension. Suspension length is determined by the seriousness of the offenses and the driver's prior driving history. An

additional driver's license suspension will result for each subsequent moving violation following the initial suspension.

- Any moving violation conviction that occurs within the first year of licensure will result in a six-month extension of the passenger limitation, which allows no more than one unrelated passenger under age 20.
- Suspended drivers are required to attend a remedial education course, may be retested and must pay a \$70 reinstatement fee.

Parents who don't live in a state with a strong GDL law, can impose their own strict restrictions. If you are not sure what the GDL law is in your state, visit your state's web site or:

http://www.iihs.org/laws/pdf/us_licensing_systems.pdf

Teens Make Poor Choices When It Comes To Riding In Vehicles

A 2008 study by researchers from the Meharry-State Farm Alliance at Meharry Medical College have discovered lack of seat belt use by teen passengers is a big problem.

Source: [sciencedaily.com](#) ♦

A first of its kind study compared the difference in seat belt use between teen passengers and drivers. The researchers found that:

- 59% of teens always buckled up in the driver seat but;
- only 42% always wore seat belts as passengers.
- Worse of all, only 38% of all teens reported always buckling up as both drivers and passengers.

Additional research from other sources shows that death rates in states with primary enforcement of seat belt laws are lower than in states without a primary seat belt law.

Seat belts improve the chances of surviving a collision by more than 50%.



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Study Shows Teens with Their Own Car Have More Crashes

Two studies published in late September showed that teens who had to share a car and whose parents who were involved in their driving in a supportive way were far less likely to be involved in a crash or to engage in risky driving behaviors.

The studies, conducted by [Children's Hospital of Philadelphia \(CHOP\)](#) and [State Farm Insurance](#), were published in the October issue of *Pediatrics*. According to a news release by State Farm Insurance, the studies were based on a [National Young Driver Survey](#) of more than 5,500 teenagers in grades 9 through 11.

The first study showed that “teens who said their parents set clear rules, paid attention to where they were going and whom they were with, and did so in a supportive way were:

- half as likely to crash
- twice as likely to wear seat belts
- 71 percent less likely to drive while intoxicated
- 30 percent less likely to use a cell phone while driving

These findings are compared to teens who said their parents were less involved.”

The second study looked at teens who either owned their own car or had easy, unrestricted access to a car were twice as likely to be involved in a crash. The study showed that almost 75% of teen drivers owned or had unrestricted access to a car. 25 % of teens who were the main driver of a car reported having been involved in a collision compared to just 10% of those who had to borrow a car.

On a basic level it makes sense; a teen that has to borrow a car faces the wrath of the owner if that car is damaged or destroyed. Teens who own their own car don't feel that sense of responsibility to protect someone else's property from harm.

These studies show the critical importance of parental involvement in a teen's driving environment and add to data that shows Graduated Drivers Licenses for teens work to create a safer driving environment for teens.

Car crashes are the main cause of death for teenagers in the United States. According to the [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\)](#), teens are involved in three times as many fatal traffic crashes as all other drivers.

NHTSA figures for 2008 show::

- Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds.
- 5,864 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes.
- 2,739 15- to 20-year-old drivers were killed
- 228,000 15- to 20-year-olds were injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- 15 to 20 year old drivers make up 6.4% of the licensed drivers in the US but they account for 12% of the fatal crashes.

Many parents, especially in those households where both parents work, look forward to the day when they no longer have to transport their teen to various activities. However parents should strongly resist the urge to buy a car for the sole use of the teen; at least for the first year. According to data from the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety \(IIHS\)](#) the most dangerous time for teens is the first year after receiving their driver's license. The IIHS states that “the crash rate per mile driven is twice as high for 16 year-olds as it is for 18-19 year-olds.”

“Our data show that one of the safest decisions families can make is for parents to control access to the keys for at least the first 6 to 12 months after a teen gets his license,” says Flaura Koplin Winston, MD, PhD, study co-author and scientific director of the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at CHOP. “Our data show an alarming trend - almost three-quarters of teens have easy access to a car. Compared to teens that have to share a car, these teens are twice as likely to crash and more likely to speed and to use a cell phone while driving. When teens have to ask for the keys before taking the car, it naturally creates the opportunity for parents to have conversations with their teens about where they are going, who they will be with, and to review the house rules about driving with passengers, wearing seat belts, using cell phones, and which routes are safe.”

A dialogue should be started with the teen before they receive their operator's license and an effective tool for setting up those rules and boundaries is the [Parent-Teen Driving Contract](#). When parents and teens both agree on what the rules should be, the teen is more likely to take ownership of that decision.

