

# Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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## Teens Killed In Single Vehicle Crashes

An eastbound 2001 Hyundai sport utility vehicle occupied by two individuals, rolled and one of the occupants was ejected. The ejected occupant, age 17, was pronounced dead at the scene. The other vehicle occupant, age 15, was transported to the McCook Community Hospital by the Trenton ambulance with non-life threatening injuries.

Source: <http://www.nebraska.tv>♦

A Norfolk teen is dead after a single-vehicle crash Sunday in rural Pierce County. Pierce County Attorney Verlyn Luebbe said in a statement released Monday that the female driver, age 17, died early Sunday

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For Teens and their Parents



morning from injuries she received in the crash that happened on a rural road near Pierce. The crash was discovered by a passing motorist shortly before dawn Sunday. Luebbe said the driver was not wearing a seat belt.

Source: <http://www.siouxcityjournal.com>♦

### Lessons Learned

These are just two of a number of single vehicle crashes in the month of November that led to the deaths and injuries of the teen age drivers and passengers.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the leading cause of death for young people and for 16 and 17 year olds, in their first years of driving, half of those fatal crashes involved one vehicle only. Most of those crashes are the result of the teen driver losing control of the vehicle and running off the road. Most of these single vehicle crashes are caused by the same common factors.

**High Speed** – Young drivers either haven't been taught by their parents (who may tend to speed themselves) or, having the attitude that "It'll never happen to me.", don't truly believe that speed kills.

Many of these single vehicle crashes involve a young driver who fails to negotiate a curve in the road. As always, the laws of physics come into play. An object in motion wants to remain in motion; in a straight line. If a driver fails to slow down to a safe speed before entering a curve, the vehicle's momentum will want to keep it going in a straight line resulting in the vehicle leaving the road and either flipping or wrapping around a tree. High speed also shortens the reaction time that a driver needs to react to an emergency situation and increases the collision forces.

**Late Night** – Late night driving is one of the primary factors in these crashes for a variety of reasons. Darkness prevents drivers from seeing the hazards ahead, especially if they are speeding. The headlights only reach so far and if a driver is “over-driving” the headlights (driving too fast to stop within the area lit by the headlights), he or she won’t see a curve or something blocking the road in time to react properly. Late night also means that the teen driver is tired and not operating at top efficiency. Driving while sleepy can be more dangerous than driving under the influence. The death rate for teens skyrockets at night and most states have Graduated Driving Laws (GDLs) for teens that prohibit driving after 11:00 PM. Even if their state does not have such a law, parents should impose one on their teen.

**Distractions** – Whether it is other teens in the car, using a cell phone, texting, or fiddling with the radio, teens have too many things to distract them from the very important task of watching the road ahead. Many states also have GDLs that prohibit having more than one passenger under the age of eighteen in the vehicle. The chances of being involved in a crash are multiplied with each teen passenger aboard. Many states also ban the use of any type of wireless electronic device whether that involves using a cell phone or texting.

**Overcorrecting** – Once a teen’s vehicle starts to leave the road, the most common and natural reaction is to jerk the wheel in an attempt to bring the car back

onto the pavement. That is the worst thing a driver can do. The vehicle’s momentum will want to keep the vehicle traveling in one direction and quickly jerking the wheel often leads to the vehicle spinning out of control and flipping over. Teens should be taught how to correctly recover if their vehicle if it runs off the pavement. If they feel the car leave the pavement, they should grip the wheel and resist the temptation to turn back onto the road. They should take their foot off the gas and, after the car has slowed a bit, gently apply the brakes to slow the car further. Once the car is traveling at a slow, safe speed, they should check the road for other traffic and then turn their wheels back onto the pavement.

**Lack of Seat Belts** – As you can see in the articles cited above, once a vehicle leaves the road, the driver and passengers are often killed when they are ejected from the vehicle. The bodies inside the car are subject to the laws of physics too and they will want to continue moving in a straight line; often that means flying out the window and slamming into the dirt or pavement at the same speed they were traveling when the vehicle started to go out of control. The teens who survived these types of crashes were wearing seat belts. No matter how bad the crash, you are always safer securely restrained inside the vehicle.

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**Alcohol** – If you take all of the hazards mentioned above and add alcohol to the mix, you are compounding the problem. Alcohol interferes with vision, (worse at night) and slows down reaction times. Alcohol also destroys good judgment giving a driver a false sense of abilities and leading to increased risk taking. Add fatigue to that and it is a tragedy waiting to happen.

## Teen Death Rate Decreases Nationwide

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has published a report showing that the death rate for teen drivers has declined markedly over the past few years. Using the NHTSA's data base, the CDC looked at teen driving fatality rates between 2004 and 2008 and found that the fatality rate for teen drivers and their passengers has decreased by thirty six percent nationwide.

There are several factors leading to the decrease:

**Graduated Driving Laws** – One of the primary factors leading to the decrease in teen fatality rates is the enactment of Graduated Driving Laws (GDLs) in most states. The GDLs are designed to introduce a new driver into the driving environment in stages, allowing him or her to gain more experience before being able to gain increased driving privileges.

With the exception of North Dakota, all states have some form of a GDL with some states imposing greater restrictions than others. According to the CDC, "a recent review of GDL evaluations concluded that the programs have reduced young driver crash risk by approximately 20% to 40%."

All U.S. GDL programs include a nighttime driving restriction, and 42 states and the District of Columbia include a teen passenger restriction that either prohibits the new driver from carrying any non-family passengers under the age of 18 or limits teen

passengers to one until the driver reaches the age of 18.

Those states with the strictest GDL laws have seen some of the most dramatic decreases in the fatality rate among 16 and 17 year olds.

**Seat Belt Laws** – Over the past few years more and more states have passed mandatory seat belt laws requiring the driver and passengers to use seat belts or face getting a ticket. Seat belts are the primary life saving device in a vehicle and their use increases the chances of surviving a crash by 45 to 55 percent.

The decrease in the teen death rate would be good news if not for the fact that too many teens are still dying on America's roads. In spite of the dramatic decrease, 1,437 sixteen and seventeen year olds lost their lives in 2008; almost four teens per day. That is still unacceptably high.

To see the teen fatality rate for your state visit:  
[http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5941a2.htm?s\\_cid=mm5941a2\\_w#tab2](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5941a2.htm?s_cid=mm5941a2_w#tab2)

## Tips for Parents: “Designated Passenger”

Whew, your teen has received their Learner's Permit and has been driving for a few months. The hard part of the jerky brakes, sudden starts and grabbing the steering wheel or grasping to the door handle for support is over.

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No major catastrophes, property damage or traffic tickets. You have entered the easy phase of having your own personal chauffeur. It is a great time to catch up on your to do lists and return phone calls, right?

Not so fast, you still have quite a bit of work to do. The "Designated Passenger" has the responsibility of making sure that the teen you are supervising is getting the most out of their learning experience. You want them to have the right driving habits and practice them consistently. Trying to correct or change a bad habit becomes harder to do as time goes by.

Besides teaching driving skills, what are some things that the "Designated Passenger" should be doing? Start by asking them questions as they are driving. Questions to pose include:

- What do you see ahead?
- Who has the right of way in this situation? What if the other vehicle was there first?
- What can you anticipate happening with those kids playing in the yard? How would you react? What should you start doing now just in case?
- What does the law say about sharing the road with bicyclists? What extra precautions should you take for them?
- If the dog up came running out into the street, what would you do?
- Walk me through what you would do right now if you had a tire blow out? What if the blow out was in the car ahead of you?
- That motorcycle behind you is coming up quickly, why is that important to know?
- What driving behaviors tell you that someone may be a distracted driver? How should you handle sharing the road with a distracted driver? What if they are impaired?

- What can you do to overcome the glare of the sun, while you are driving? What if the fog rolled in?
- Your traffic light just turned green, what should you do before accelerating?
- If the vehicle went off the road right now, what is the right way to get back on the road?
- If another car was headed straight towards us head-on, what is the first thing you would do? Then what next? And so on.

Once they exercise strong control of the vehicle, have experience and understand the different types of driving environments and have the necessary driving skills down, the "Designated Passenger" has to change their focus to teaching defensive driving skills. You may also want them to take a defensive driving course and an advanced car control course to help them gain knowledge and experience on handling driving emergencies that you won't be able to simulate for them.

Even after they are fully licensed, continue to monitor their driving from a "Designated Passenger" role. Driver education is continuing education and there is ongoing work to do to help keep new drivers safe.



"NO, WE CAN'T SWING BY AND PICK UP YOUR GIRLFRIEND FOR THE HOLIDAY DANCE."