

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

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December Teen Death Rate High

Source: [http:// http://www.google.com](http://http://www.google.com) ♦

Lessons Learned

A Google News search of teens killed in December revealed that at least 55 teens died in motor vehicle collisions during the month. This Google search of news reports is not a scientific survey and it doesn't turn up all of the news articles nor does it reflect the official statistics by state safety agencies. It is safe to assume that many more teens were killed than were reported in this search. This search didn't include teen passengers killed while an adult was at the wheel or teens that were killed in multiple car crashes where an adult was deemed to be at fault for causing the collision. It only included fatal crashes in which the teen driver was alleged to have been at fault.

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For Teens and their Parents



In the 52 reported fatal crashes:

- 36 teen drivers were killed.
- 19 teen passengers were killed.
- 16 of the teen drivers were injured.
- 37 additional passengers were injured in fatal collisions.
- 2 occupants of other vehicles were killed
- 15 people in other vehicles were injured.
- 81% of the crashes were single vehicle crashes.
- Seat belts were not used in 25% of the fatal crashes.
- High speed was identified as the contributing factor in 19% of the crashes.
- 87% of the crashes involved loss of control of the vehicle by the teen driver (Loss of control is generally caused by a driver distraction in which the driver leaves the road and tries to over-correct, or when the driver is driving too fast for conditions and fails to negotiate a curve or turn, or a combination of high speed and a driver distraction.)
- 2 teens died in dirt bike and moped crashes.

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- 1 teen died and 1 was injured in an ATV crash.
- Alcohol use was considered to be the contributing factor in 10% of the crashes.
- In 16 of the crashes (31%), the vehicle was carrying 3 or more occupants.
- Pennsylvania led the nation with 6 deaths followed by Kentucky and North Carolina with 4 each.
- The weekends of the 15th through the 17th, with 7 crashes and 8 deaths and the 28th through the 30th, with 6 crashes and 8 deaths were the worst periods.
- 2 teens died with their brother or sister at the wheel; one in a car given as a Christmas present.

This unscientific article search shows that the statistics on teen driving hold up. Most teen driving crashes are single vehicle crashes and the main causes for teen driving deaths are speeding, driver distraction, lack of seat belt use, and use of alcohol or other drugs. Graduated Licensing Laws (GDL) are designed to limit the number of passengers a teen driver can carry and to try to limit distractions by prohibiting use of cell phones. Violating traffic laws can result in suspension of a teen driver's license. Both parents and teens should know and understand their state's Graduated Licensing Laws and parents should enforce them.

Teens and Drowsy Driving

Two Georgia teens were involved in a crash when the newly licensed teen driver fell asleep at the wheel.



A 16 year old driver with less than 6 months solo experience behind-the-wheel set out with his 14 year old brother as a passenger to pick up their mother at the airport after a business trip.

The driver had attended school and, after school, practiced for the state finals cross-country meet scheduled for the next day. The first part of the trip took the brothers on a sparsely traveled four-lane divided highway that runs for approximately 20 miles before meeting with the interstate.

The driver reported that his younger brother had fallen asleep on the passenger side and, being tired after practice, suffering from highway hypnosis, and no one to talk to, he started feeling sleepy himself. He planned to stop at the next gas station and get some coffee to help him stay awake. He didn't make it!

He fell asleep long enough for the car to drift off the road. The initial impact of the car hitting a guard rail at approximately 55 mph jolted both brothers and they awoke to find the vehicle airborne. The car remained airborne long enough for both brothers to realize the peril they were in and to say "I love you" to each other before the final crash. When the car finally came to a halt, it was facing in the opposite direction of traffic.

Fortunately, both brothers escaped with minor injuries; a lot of bruises and, for the younger brother, a concussion. They were able to crawl out through the window.

Lessons Learned

This crash wasn't reported in the newspapers and the

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driver, instead of being ticketed for careless driving, received only a warning instead. The reason this crash came to light was that the two boys involved are this author's only grandchildren and we came very close to losing them on that day.

Drowsy driving is a major problem on America's roads.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 2.5% of fatal motor vehicle crashes (approximately 730 in 2009) and 2.0% of all crashes with nonfatal injuries (approximately 30,000 in 2009) involve drowsy driving.

According to a survey of 147,076 drivers over the age of 18 published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta last month:

- 4.2% reported having fallen asleep while driving at least one time during the previous 30 days.
- Men were more likely to report drowsy driving than women (5.3% versus 3.2%).
- Drowsy driving prevalence decreased with age, from more than 4.9% among adults aged 18–44 years to 1.7% among those aged 65 years and older.
- Drowsiness also impairs reaction time and decision making skills.

The problem with drowsy driving is that, once a driver starts to feel drowsy, it is **impossible to tell when that driver will actually fall asleep.**

Many drivers will try to push on through with disastrous results. Even though the next gas station was less than 2 miles away, my grandson was unable to stay awake long enough to make it.

Instead of waiting until he reached the next gas station, the best thing to do would have been to pull the car as far as possible off the road. Then he could have gotten out and let the cool air refresh him or even put the seat back to take a short nap.

Even if you make it to a gas station where you can get a cup of coffee, it will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes for the caffeine to reach your system and start waking you up. Experts advise that, after drinking the coffee, the driver should take a short nap. Taking a short nap while waiting for the caffeine to kick in will ensure that you are doubly

refreshed and ready to resume driving.

A couple of things worked together to save the boys. First, new cars are designed with crumple zones to absorb the initial impact of a crash. The engine is designed to break away and fall underneath the vehicle rather than being driven into the passenger compartment. You can see in the photo above that the front of the car is almost totally crushed but the passenger compartment remained intact.

The second and **most important thing that saved their lives was the fact that both were wearing their seat belts** and the vehicle's airbags deployed to cushion the impact. The passenger, who was probably sleeping with his head against the window, received a concussion, most likely when the passenger side airbag deployed. A concussion from the airbag is undesirable but the injury was most certainly far less than would have occurred had his head hit or gone through the glass window.

Had they not been wearing their seat belts, on initial impact, both boys would have continued traveling forward at 55 mph. With each weighing approximately 140 pounds, that means they would have each struck the dashboard or windshield with a crash force of 14,166 pounds. Being belted in, they were restrained and, instead of striking the wheel or dashboard before the airbag was able to deploy, their heads were cushioned by the airbags.

If no other lesson is learned from this crash, the main lesson to take away is that:

SEAT BELTS SAVE LIVES!



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The advertisement features a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue and white striped shirt and denim overalls, sitting at a desk and smiling. She is looking at a laptop. The background is a warm, brownish-orange color.