

Teen Drivers: Fact Sheet

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens, accounting for more than one in three deaths in this age group.¹ In 2008, nine teens ages 16 to 19 died every day from motor vehicle injuries. Per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are four times more likely than older drivers to crash. Fortunately, teen motor vehicle crashes are preventable, and proven strategies can improve the safety of young drivers on the road.

How big is the problem?

In 2008, about 3,500 teens in the United States aged 15–19 were killed and more than 350,000 were treated in emergency departments for injuries suffered in motor-vehicle crashes.^{1,2}

Young people ages 15-24 represent only 14% of the U.S. population. However, they account for 30% (\$19 billion) of the total costs of motor vehicle injuries among males and 28% (\$7 billion) of the total costs of motor vehicle injuries among females.³

Who is most at risk?

The risk of motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16- to 19-year-olds than among any other age group. In fact, per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are four times more likely than older drivers to crash.⁴





Among teen drivers, those at especially high risk for motor vehicle crashes are:

- **Males:** In 2006, the motor vehicle death rate for male drivers and passengers ages 15 to 19 was almost two times that of their female counterparts.¹
- **Teens driving with teen passengers:** The presence of teen passengers increases the crash risk of unsupervised teen drivers. This risk increases with the number of teen passengers.⁵
- **Newly licensed teens:** Crash risk is particularly high during the first year that teenagers are eligible to drive.⁴

What factors put teen drivers at risk?

- Teens are more likely than older drivers to underestimate dangerous situations or not be able to recognize hazardous situations.⁶
- Teens are more likely than older drivers to speed and allow shorter headways (the distance from the front of one vehicle to the front of the next). The presence of male teenage passengers increases the likelihood of this risky driving behavior.⁷
- Among male drivers between 15 and 20 years of age who were involved in fatal crashes in 2005, 37% were speeding at the time of the crash and 26% had been drinking.^{8,9}
- Compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. In 2005, 10% of high school students reported they rarely or never wear seat belts when riding with someone else.¹⁰
- Male high school students (12.5%) were more likely than female students (7.8%) to rarely or never wear seat belts.¹⁰
- African-American students (12%) and Hispanic students (13%) were more likely than white students (10.1%) to rarely or never wear seat belts.¹⁰
- At all levels of blood alcohol concentration (BAC), the risk of involvement in a motor vehicle crash is greater for teens than for older drivers.¹⁰
- In 2008, 25% of drivers ages 15 to 20 who died in motor vehicle crashes had a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or higher.¹⁰
- In a national survey conducted in 2007, nearly three out of ten teens reported that, within the previous month, they had ridden with a driver who had been drinking alcohol. One in ten reported having driven after drinking alcohol within the same one-month period.¹⁰
- In 2008, nearly three out of every four teen drivers killed in motor vehicle crashes after drinking and driving were not wearing a seat belt.¹⁰
- In 2008, half of teen deaths from motor vehicle crashes occurred between 3 p.m. and midnight and 56% occurred on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday.¹⁰

References

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