

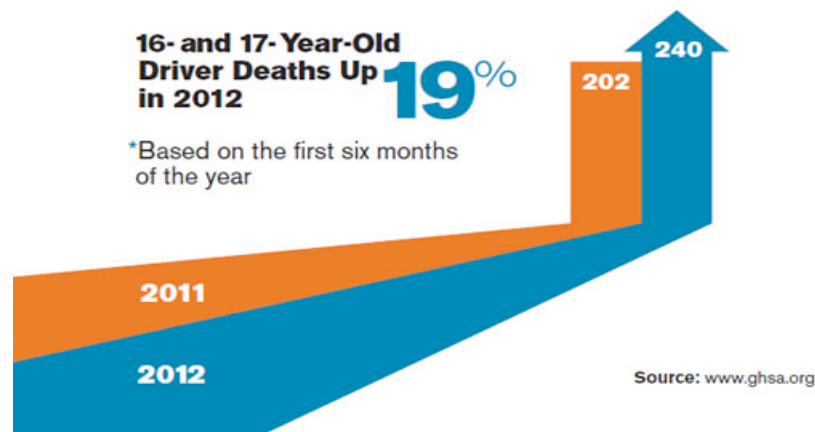


Teen Driving Risks – What can parents do?

There is good news and bad news about teen driving. The bad news first:

- Traffic crashes remain the leading cause of death for US teens
- Per mile driven, teen drivers aged 16 to 19 are three times more likely than drivers aged 20 and older to be in a fatal crash.
- After a near decade-long decline in overall teen driving fatalities, the numbers started inching back up in 2011 and 2012:

A new report from the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) found a 19% increase in the number of deaths for drivers aged 16-17 in the first half of 2012.



The GHSA attributes the increase to two main factors: (1) The economic recovery

has brought more teens out onto the road, and; (2) fewer states have been strengthening their Graduated Driver Licensing systems, which allow teens to gain valuable experience.

What about texting?

Unfortunately, even with all of the warnings about the dangers of texting while driving, teens still can't resist. More than 25% of teens report texting at least once each time they drive. A new study also found:

- 20% of teens say they have multi-message text conversations while driving.
- More than 10% update or check social media sites while driving.

Texting is the most dangerous distracting activity for teens, because it distracts their mental ability, their vision, and their hands. But all distracting activities cause problems for teens – like talking on cell phones, adjusting music, eating, talking to passengers -- because of their inexperience at driving and their immaturity. Sadly, 11% of all drivers under the age of 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported as distracted at the time of the crash (US DOT).

The good news is – parents can have a big impact.

According to the American Automobile Association (AAA), “Studies show parental involvement and restrictions significantly reduce risky behavior during a driver’s first 12 to 18 months behind the wheel.” AAA strongly recommends that parents stay engaged, and it provides many tips on the website Teendriving.AAA.com.

New teen drivers are 50% more likely to crash during their first month of licensed driving than after their first full year - AAA



Phase in driving privileges and set limits

Whether or not your state uses an official graduated licensing program, you can and should phase in privileges as a parent. During their first years of driving, teens face increased risks not only from texting but also from:

- Driving for the first time unsupervised
- Driving at night
- Driving with other teens (crash risk multiplies with each additional teen)
- Driving without a seatbelt (Only 54% of teens say they always wear seat belts when riding with someone else)



conditions.

You can't be in the car with your teen to take the cell phone out of their hand, but you can set limits on when you give them the keys to the car. In the first few months, AAA recommends you consider restricting your teen to unsupervised driving only during the day and in fair weather; make the time to give them supervised practice under poor sight and weather

Studies have shown that Graduated Driver's License structures reduce fatalities, so mimic these on your own:

- Continue supervising your teen in the first 100 hours
- Impose nighttime restrictions starting at 9 or 10 pm
- Allow no more than one teen passenger (or no teen passengers)
- Require a ban on all cell phone and electronic use at all times

Be a safe role model

One thing completely in parents' control is their own behavior. A University of Michigan study found a positive correlation between parents' distracted driving and their teens' behaviors.

Kids who see Mom or Dad doing everything but driving while they're on the road will think that's normal. So the next time you have one finger on the wheel while you talk on the cell phone and reach for those French fries, think again.