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Teen Driver Safety

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Factors that Increase the Risk of Crashes

Teens (/youth-topics/teen-driver-safety/characteristics-youth-most-risk-motor-vehicle-crashes), particularly those with risk-taking personalities, are disproportionately at risk for motor vehicle crashes. Research further shows that certain situations and environmental factors or actions increase the chance that a teen will be injured or killed in a motor vehicle crash. Most of the factors listed below are not unique to teen drivers, but the lack of experience of teen drivers increases the associated risk.

+ **Alcohol** (javascript:void())

+ **Distracted Driving** (javascript:void())

- **Driving with Other Teens in the Car** (javascript:void())

Driving, which provides teens with autonomy from their parents and can be seen as a means for increasing social standing, is often a social event for teens (Allen & Brown, 2008). Because of this, teen drivers often have other teens in the car with them (Shope & Bingham, 2008). Teen passengers increase the crash risk for unsupervised teen drivers (Chen, Baker, Braver, & Li, 2000) and increase the likelihood that the crash is the fault of the teen driver (Shope & Bingham, 2008). Additionally, Chen et al. (2000) found that cars that had more teen passengers were at a higher risk for crashes. This risk is unique to teens. Adult drivers do not show a similar pattern of risk (Shope & Bingham, 2008).
In exploring how teen passengers may influence teen drivers, Allen and Brown (2008) suggest adolescent development and structural restrictions imposed by driving may lead to the increased risk of crashes with peer passengers. They suggest that youth are influenced by

- their drive to engage in risky situations,
- their desire to please peers, and
- the cost associated with alienating peers.

They also suggest that the act of driving imposes restrictions on how youth can interact with peers who are pressuring them. While the driver is held accountable and legally responsible for what happens when he or she is driving, peers who suggest risky behavior are not held responsible for the consequences that occur. Young drivers also have to deal with the inability to gather visual cues from their peers and understand whether they are serious or joking, the inability to joke around or act unconventionally when they are driving, and the inability to focus on addressing peer pressure because they must attend to driving. A national survey found that 94 percent of teens reported seeing passengers, at least sometimes, acting in ways that would distract the driver: 69 percent indicated that they had witnessed teen passengers acting wildly, 53 percent indicated that they had seen passengers who had been drinking alcohol or smoking marijuana, and 45 percent indicated that they had heard passengers urging the driver to speed (Winston et al., 2007).

- **Risky Driving** (javascript:void())

Allen and Brown (2008) suggest that youth have a higher propensity toward participating in risky behaviors, including those related to driving. Research suggests that teenage drivers are more likely to pull into traffic with less space, make illegal lane changes, maintain less distance between cars, and drive faster (Shope & Bingham, 2008; Ivers et al., 2009). This risky behavior increases with the presence of peers, especially male passengers (Simons-Morton, Lerner, &

Singer, 2005; Allen & Brown, 2008) and boys are more likely to be involved in speed-related fatal crashes than girls (NHTSA, 2008a). From 2004-2008, 36 percent of 16- and 17-year-old drivers (3,429 individuals) were reportedly speeding at the time of the crash. The risk of speeding is higher for youth who have also been drinking. In 2008, 27 percent of youth under 21 and 50 percent of youth 21-24 involved in fatal crashes while speeding had a blood alcohol content of .08 or higher (NHTSA, 2008a).

+ **Seat Belt Use** (javascript:void())

- **Nighttime and Weekend Driving** (javascript:void())

There is a higher crash risk associated with driving at night and on the weekends for all drivers, but the risk is even higher for youth (Shope & Bingham, 2008). In 2009, the highest percent of crashes for teens occurred between 6 and 9 p.m. (18 percent), 9 p.m. and midnight (17 percent), and midnight and 3 a.m. (16 percent) (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), 2009). Further, the 2009 data suggests that 55 percent of fatal crashes for teens occurred on the weekends; 16 percent of crashes occurred on Friday, 21 percent on Saturday, and 18 percent on Sunday (IIHS, 2009). Limited visual information, fatigue, alcohol use, risk-taking, and the presence of teen passengers in the car all lead to increased crash risk for young drivers.

+ **Rural vs. Urban Driving** (javascript:void())

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Resources

Distraction.gov (http://www.distraction.gov/)

Distraction.gov provides wide array of information and resources about distracted driving including information from the 2010 summit on distracted driving, campaign tools, facts, statistics and research, information about laws in different states related to distracted driving, speeches, press releases and other resources for the media.

Impaired Driving (http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides a website and fact sheet (http://www.cdc.gov/MotorVehicleSafety/Impaired_Driving/impaired-drv_factsheet.html) on impaired driving which highlights the problem of impaired driving, especially for youth, ways impaired driving can be prevented and activities and programs that communities can to curb the problem.

Parents Are the Key to Safe Teen Drivers
(http://www.cdc.gov/parentsarethekey/)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Parents Are the Key campaign provides resources and information for parents about teen driving and what they can do to help their teen become a safe driver.

Protect the Ones You Love: Child Injuries Are Preventable – Road Traffic Injuries (http://www.cdc.gov/safechild/Road_Traffic_Injuries/index.html)

This CDC initiative was developed to raise parents' awareness about the leading causes of child injury in the United States and how they can be prevented.

Teen Drivers (CDC) (http://www.cdc.gov/Motorvehiclesafety/Teen_Drivers/index.html)

This CDC website provides fact sheets, research and activities, and blogs related to teen driver safety.

Teen Drivers (DOT/NHTSA) (http://www.nhtsa.gov/Teen-Drivers)

This U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration website provides information, talking points, media tools, collateral materials, and various other marketing materials regarding a comprehensive approach to teen driver safety.

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+ Expand All (javascript:void())

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