

The Need For Federal Teen Driving Legislation to Bring Uniformity to Graduated Driver Licensing

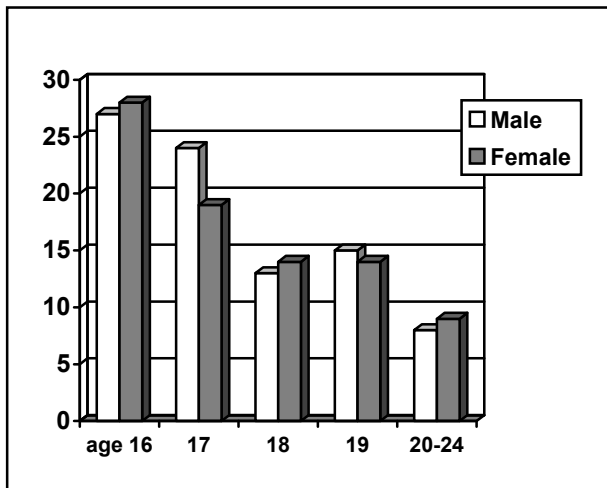
Backed by Expert Research

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 3,108 young drivers aged 15-20 were killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2007. An additional 1,967 others, passengers in vehicles with the young drivers, were killed in these crashes. All in all, in 2007, nearly 8,000 people lost their lives in crashes involving young drivers.

By any measure, this represents a major public health epidemic. State **graduated driver licensing (GDL)** programs allow new young drivers to gain experience under supervised and less risky conditions, addressing several major facets of the teen driving problem. Each state's GDL program, however, contains varying elements resulting in a patchwork quilt of strong and weak laws across the nation designed to protect young drivers. Federal legislation using the same approach as that addressing .08% blood alcohol concentration (BAC) and 21 as the national legal minimum drinking age would bring necessary uniformity to GDL programs. Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety and other organizations are strongly in support of such a federal approach.

This fact sheet highlights examples of research as they relate to each of the major elements generally accepted as effective components of GDL. Advocates' position is that all of these components should be addressed in federal legislation.

Number of Crash Involvements per Million Miles Driven, by Driver Age, 2001



Insurance Institute For Highway Safety, 2005

Research Supports GDL Elements in Federal Legislation

Three-Stage Licensing Process: Learner's → Intermediate → Full License

- 44 States in the U.S. and the District of Columbia have adopted a three-level GDL system for new beginning drivers. (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)
- It is important to include both of the first two stages, learner's and intermediate (of a complete GDL system), but many states have not done so. Some only include the learner's stage, with a few including

only a night driving prohibition in the intermediate licensing stage; sacrificing either of these elements likely limits program effectiveness. (Williams and Mayhew (2004), “Graduated Licensing: A Blueprint for North America,” Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and Traffic Injury Research Foundation.)

- All states identified some crash reduction among teen drivers following GDL implementation. This positive effect was observed across different geographic regions, and with different GDL programs. Simple counts are down – fewer teens are experiencing crashes and becoming injured. (Shope and Molnar (2003), “Graduated driver licensing in the United States: evaluation results from the early programs,” *Journal of Safety Research*.)

Minimum Age of 16 Years for Learner’s Permit

- At present, 8 states (CT, DE, KY, MA, NJ, NY, PA and RI) and DC have adopted age 16 as the minimum age for obtaining a learner’s permit. Eleven more states (AZ, CA, CO, HI, MD, NV, NH, OH, OK, VA, WI) have the minimum entry age for licensure at 15 years and 6 months to 15 years and 9 months.
- Further increasing the amount of time that has to be spent as a learner, or raising the minimum permit age, are ways to enhance license delay. (Williams, A.F., “Contribution of the components of graduated licensing to crash reductions,” *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 2007.)
- Age of obtaining a learner’s permit can be a factor as well as length of learner’s holding

period. An analysis of fatal crash rates for drivers aged 15-17 in states with different minimum learner’s permit and intermediate license ages found that as these ages decrease, fatal crash rates increase. The earlier young people are allowed to learn and the earlier they become licensed are both associated with higher fatal crash rates (Preusser & Tison, *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 2007, quoted in National Safety Council fact sheet on GDL and Extended Learner’s Permit Holding Periods, 2007).

- The authors of a Wisconsin study of GDL restrictions adopted in 2000 concluded that GDL’s effect was due to reduced teenage driving through delayed licensure and reduced driving in risky situations through the intermediate license restrictions rather than to safer driving by teens. (Fohr, S.A., Layde, P.M., & Guse, C.E. “Graduated driver licensing in Wisconsin: does it create safer drivers?” *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, 2005.)

(Minimum) 6-Month Learner’s Permit Stage

92 percent of Americans support a 6-month learner’s permit period.

Louis Harris Poll, 2001

- In a graduated system, an extended learner’s period is essential to provide the opportunity for extensive supervised on-road practice in a variety of conditions.... The developing consensus is that a minimum of 6 months is reasonable. (Williams and Mayhew (2004),

“Graduated Licensing: A Blueprint for North America,” IIHS and Traffic Injury Research Foundation.)

- “AAP Policy on Essential Features That Should Be Mandated in GDL Systems.”
 1. A learner-permit phase that starts **no earlier than 16 years** of age and lasts **at least 6 mos.**
 2. A minimum of 30 hours (preferably 50 hours) of adult-supervised, on-road driving during the permit stage (at least 5-10 of these supervised practice hours should be at night).
 3. A provisional (intermediate) stage with restrictions, that **last until 18 years of age.**

(American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention and Committee on Adolescence, *Pediatrics* Volume 118 No. 6, December 2006, pp. 2570-2581).

Nighttime Driving Prohibition

- A total of 44 states and DC have adopted some version of a nighttime driving restriction, but only a handful take the optimal approach and begin the restriction at 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. (Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, *2008 Roadmap to State Highway Safety Laws*).
- Nighttime driving is especially risky for young beginners, and young people also adapt to night driving restrictions. (Williams and Preusser (1997), “Night driving restrictions for youthful drivers: a literature review and commentary.” *Journal of Public Health Policy*.)
- Nighttime driving restrictions that begin both early and late effectively reduce crashes during the restricted hours, but

those restrictions that start earlier reduce a greater number of crashes because more drivers are affected. (Preusser, Williams, Zador and Blomberg (1984), “The effect of curfew laws on motor vehicles crashes,” *Law and Policy*.)

Teen Passenger Restrictions

74 percent of Americans support limiting the number of teen passengers in a car with a teen driver and supervised driving during high-risk periods, such as night.

Louis Harris Poll, 2001

- Using fatal and injury crash data from California’s Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System, this study found that teenage passengers are a causal factor in crashes of 16-year-old drivers and that in the 3 years following implementation of the new law, the average number of teenage passengers carried by 16-year-olds decreased by approximately 25%. Without considering the beneficial effect of a decrease in the crash rate, the decrease in the number of teenage passengers in actual crashes resulted in lives saved and the prevention of injuries over a 3-year period. (Cooper, Atkins and Gillen (2004), “Measuring the impact of passenger restrictions on new teenage drivers,” *Accident Analysis & Prevention*.)

Collectively, findings from these studies indicate that the presence of passengers strongly increases crash risk for teenage drivers; the more passengers the greater the

risk. (Williams (2001), “Teenage Passengers in Motor Vehicle Crashes: A Summary of Current Research,” *IHS*.)

- Aldridge, Himmler, Aultman-Hall and Stamatiadis (1999), “Impact of passengers on driver safety,” *Transportation Research Record*, Transportation Research Board.
- Chen, Baker, Braver and Li (2000), “Carrying passengers as a risk factor for crashes fatal to 16- and 17-year-old drivers,” *Journal of American Medical Association*.
- Doherty, Andrey and MacGregor (1998), “The situational risks of young drivers: the influence of passengers, time of day, and day of week on accident rates,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.
- Preusser, Ferguson and Williams (1998), “The effect of teenage passengers on the fatal crash risk of teenage drivers,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.

Cell Phone Use Prohibition During Learner’s and Intermediate Phases

Mounting research indicates that the use of cell phones while driving, especially among young drivers, leads to unacceptable safety risk.

- An Australian study found that cell phone use while driving resulted in a fourfold increase in crashes. (McEvoy, et al. (2005), “Role of cellular phones in motor vehicle crashes resulting in hospital attendance,” *British Medical Journal*.)
- NHTSA has reported that the highest level of cell phone use while driving was among young drivers, ages 16-24. (Glassbrenner (2005), “Driver Cell Phone Use in 2004 – Overall Results, *NHTSA*.)

Maintaining Restrictions Until Age 18

Research shows that 16-17 year-olds are over-represented in motor vehicle crashes, and restrictions are important factors in reducing deaths and injuries.

- Currently, 9 states (CT, FL, GA, IN, MA, NV, NJ, OH, VA) and DC have adopted age 18 as the minimum age for having an unrestricted license. Another 22 states have the minimum age for an unrestricted license ranging from age 17 to 17 years and 9 months.
- Drivers aged 16 - 17 years had markedly higher risks for fatal crashes than older drivers. Compared with driving alone, driver death rates per 10 million trips increased with the number of passengers for drivers aged 16 or 17 years. The highest death rate (5.61 per 10 million trips) was observed among drivers aged 16 years carrying 3 or more passengers. In contrast, death rates per 10 million trips for drivers aged 30 to 59 years were lower for drivers with passengers than for those without passengers.... (Chen, Baker, Braver, Li, “Carrying Passengers as a Risk Factor for Crashes Fatal to 16- and 17-Year-Old Drivers,” *Journal of American Medicine (JAMA)*, March 22/29, 2000.)
- 16-19-year-old drivers are involved in nighttime fatal crashes at much higher rates (per 100 million vehicle miles traveled) than drivers ages 20 – 70. (McCartt, A., Lifesavers Conference, April 2006, “Latest Research on the Effects of Graduated Driver Licensing,” *Fatal Analysis Reporting System – FARS*).

(Minimum) 6-Month Intermediate Stage

- The specified minimum length of time for the intermediate phase is 1 year in Newfoundland; 1 year, 3 months in Manitoba; 1 year, 6 months in the Yukon; and 2 years in Nova Scotia. In Canada, the age of graduation from the system is not an issue because this is not linked to driver age. In the U.S., only 9 states hold young people in the system until age 18; this can be done by raising the starting age, setting the duration of the stages so it is impossible to graduate before age 18, or requiring beginners to remain in the intermediate stage until age 18 even though they may have completed the time requirements at a younger age. (Williams and Mayhew (2004), “Graduated Licensing: A Blueprint for North America,” IIHS and Traffic Injury Research Foundation.)

(Minimum) 30 Hours of Supervised Driving with Driver 21+ During Learner’s Stage

- Supervised driving is a relatively safe activity. (Williams, Preusser, Ferguson and Ulmer (1997), “Analysis of the fatal crash involvements of 15-year-old drivers,” *Journal of Safety Research*.)

- A critical aspect of the learner’s phase is to require adult supervision of all driving – i.e., supervision by a fully licensed driver at least age 21. Requiring parents to certify that a certain number of hours have been driven under supervision facilitates the goal of the learner’s stage. It also protects against the possibility that beginners will stay off the roads to avoid crashes or traffic violations that may delay graduation to the next stage. (Williams and Mayhew (2004), “Graduated Licensing: A Blueprint for North America,” IIHS and Traffic Injury Research Foundation.)

Automatic Delay of Full Licensure for Traffic Offenses

- Making advancement to full licensure contingent upon a violation-free record when driving on the provisional license has also evidenced a reduction in accidents and violations during that phase of licensure. (McKnight and Peck (2003), “Graduated driver licensing and safer driving,” *Journal of Safety Research*.)

95 percent of Americans support a requirement of 30 to 50 hours of practice driving with an adult.

Louis Harris Poll, 2001

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