



Teen Driver Safety

Neuroscience has firmly established that young people are hard-wired for risk-taking in their early teens, making their reckless behavior troubling but not surprising. Research supports the passage of teen driving safety laws to provide a safer environment for teens to learn and improve their driving skills during this risky developmental timeframe. In fact, graduated licensing laws have reduced teen crashes 10-30% on average.ⁱ

Despite the fact that underage drinking has declined, underage drinking and driving continues to be a factor in alcohol-related traffic fatalities among people under 21. In 2012, 28% of the young drivers (aged 15 to 20 years old) killed in traffic crashes had a BAC of .01 or higher.ⁱⁱ

Drivers are less likely to use seat belts when they have been drinking. In 2012, 55% of young drivers involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained.ⁱⁱⁱ

Distracted driving is also a factor in teen traffic fatalities. For drivers 15-19 years old involved in fatal crashes, 21% of the distracted drivers were distracted by the use of cell phones.^{iv} One in three texting teens aged 16 to 17 reported texting while driving and 43% have talked on their cell phones while driving.^v

State laws on teen driver safety:

Zero Tolerance: Every state has a zero tolerance law that makes it illegal for teens to drive with any measurable amount of alcohol.

Primary Safety Belt: 33 states (AK, AL, AR, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, IL, IN, KS, KY, LA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MS, NC, NJ, NM, NY, OK, OR, RI, SC, TN, TX, WA, WI, WV), in addition to D.C., American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have primary safety belt laws.

- In 6 states (CO, ID, ND, PA, VT, and VA), safety belt laws are secondary for adults but primary for passengers under 18.
- Utah's safety belt law is secondary for adults but primary for passengers under 19.
- Missouri's safety belt law is secondary for adults but primary for passengers under 16.

Graduated driver licensing (GDL): Every state and D.C. has a 3-tier GDL system that allows teens to gradually gain driving experience under lower-risk circumstances, with requirements for supervision and restrictions on nighttime driving and passengers. State laws vary widely and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has detailed information on state [laws](#).

Hand-Held Cell Phone Use: 12 states (CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, MD, NV, NJ, NY, OR, WA, WV) in addition to D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands prohibit **all drivers** from using hand-held cell phones while driving.

All Cell Phone Use: No state bans all cell phone use for all drivers, but 37 states (AL, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, NE, NJ, NM, NC, ND, OH, OR, RI,

SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WV, WS, WY) as well as D.C. and Guam, ban all cell phone use by **novice drivers**, and 20 states and D.C. prohibit it for **school bus drivers**.

Text Messaging: 43 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands ban text messaging for all drivers. Currently, only AZ, MS, MO, MT, OK, and TX have no ban on all drivers.

Responsibility.org Position:

The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility supports comprehensive teen driving safety laws that include zero tolerance for drinking alcohol and driving under the age of 21, primary safety belt requirements, graduated licensing, and a complete ban on texting and cell phone use while driving for novice teen drivers.

ⁱ <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/laws/graduatedlicenseintro?topicName=teenagers>

ⁱⁱ <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812019.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/812019.pdf>

^{iv} <http://www.distraction.gov/download/811737.pdf>

^v <http://www.pewinternet.org/2009/11/16/teens-and-distracted-driving/>