

## Teen Driving

**A research study and commentary in this month's *JAMA Pediatrics* argue that families should recognize driving as a health behavior because motor vehicle crashes are currently the leading cause of death for adolescents.**

More teens die in car crashes than from diseases such as diabetes mellitus and asthma. Parents can play a big role in preventing motor vehicle crashes in several ways. First, teens learn to drive from watching their parents. Second, teens often state that their parents have the most influence on their driving habits by showing skills and setting limits. Finally, and most importantly, parents can set rules for early driving experiences that will reduce the risk of their teen being involved in a crash.

### What Increases the Risk of a Motor Vehicle Crash

1. **Being young:** The risk of a teen driver getting into a collision is more than 3 times that of an adult. The most common cause of an adolescent motor vehicle crash is lack of experience, not necessarily because the adolescent took risks. The highest risk of a crash is in the first 12 months of having a driver's license.
2. **Having passengers:** Teen drivers who have 3 or more passengers in a car are more than 4 times likely to be involved in a crash.
3. **Being distracted:** Texting while driving increases the risk of a car crash by 23 times; this is equal to driving with a blood alcohol level of more than twice the legal limit and is even worse if the driver is a teen.

### What Parents Can Do

During the driver training period, parents should provide enough practice opportunities to be sure that your teen can recognize potential sources of crash risk. It is important to make sure your teen can consider driving risks under a wide range of driving conditions that he or she is likely to face once driving alone, including more difficult situations such as driving at night or in bad weather.

Work closely with your teen as he or she learns to drive. It is helpful to use the structure of driver's education programs and state-graduated driver license (GDL) programs to guide the learning process. However, it is important to know that not all teens learn at the same rate. Some teens may need more time at a certain stage, or with particular driving skills. Additional time or parental monitoring may be needed to help teens with skills that are more challenging.

Once your teen gets a license, know your state laws. Many states have GDL rules that limit hours a new driver can drive and who is



allowed to be in the car. These laws have led to decreased teen driver crashes and have prevented many injuries and deaths. If your state has these laws, be sure you understand and follow them, or extend those rules as long as is necessary for your child. If your state does not have these laws, consider learning about them and using them as model rules for your teen.

Wear a seatbelt, and insist your teen wears one too. More than half of teens killed in car crashes were not wearing seat belts. Parents can be role models by always wearing a seat belt and checking that their child does too beginning at an early age.

Place strict rules on use of cell phones. Teens should not use cell phones while driving, even hands-free.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[http://www.nsc.org/safety\\_road/TeenDriving/Pages/teen\\_driving.aspx](http://www.nsc.org/safety_road/TeenDriving/Pages/teen_driving.aspx)

<http://www.nhtsa.gov/Driving+Safety/Teen+Drivers>

**+** To find this and other JAMA Pediatrics Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on the *JAMA Pediatrics* website at [jamapediatrics.com](http://jamapediatrics.com).

**Author:** Megan Moreno, MD, MEd, MPH  
**Resource:** American Academy of Pediatrics

The JAMA Pediatrics Patient Page is a public service of *JAMA Pediatrics*. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your child's medical condition, *JAMA Pediatrics* suggests that you consult your child's physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, call 312/464-0776.