

# Traffic Safety Facts

## Laws

Volume 1

Number 1

May 2003

## Graduated Driver Licensing System

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) at the U.S. Department of Transportation encourages States to implement a graduated driver licensing system. Easing young drivers onto the roadways by controlling their exposure to progressively more difficult driving experiences can reduce the incidence of traffic crashes involving young drivers.

A significant percentage of young drivers are involved in traffic crashes and are twice as likely as adult drivers to be in a fatal crash. Sixteen-year-old drivers have crash rates that are three times higher than 17-

year-old drivers, five times greater than 18-year-old drivers, and twice the rate for 85-year-old drivers. The problems contributing to these higher crash rates include lack of driving experience and inadequate driving skills; excessive driving during nighttime, higher-risk hours; risk-taking behavior; poor driving judgment and decision making; drinking and driving; and distractions from teenage passengers.

To address these problems, traffic safety researchers developed a licensing system that would prolong the learning process for young novice drivers. Based on this system, NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) developed an entry-level driver licensing program to give young drivers more time to learn the complex skills required to operate a vehicle. The program consists of three stages, identified at each stage by the type of license: learner's permit, intermediate (provisional) license, and full licensure. Young drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior at each stage of licensing before advancing to the next level.

### Key Facts

- In 2001, 6,014 young drivers and passengers aged 15-20 died in motor vehicle crashes.

- Approximately 36 percent of all deaths for people aged 15-20 are from motor vehicle crashes, according to data from the National Center for Health Statistics.
- Crashes involving teenage drivers (those 15-20 years old) cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$42.3 billion in 2001.
- In 2001, 23 percent of the young drivers (aged 15-20) involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.
- These young drivers (aged 15-20) make up 6.8 percent (based on latest available data from 2000) of the total driving population, but constitute 12.7 percent of alcohol-involved drivers in fatal crashes.
- In 2001, 61 percent of youth (aged 15-20) who died in passenger vehicles were not wearing safety belts (if restraint use was known).
- In the last two years, non-alcohol-related fatalities decreased by 1 percent for youth aged 15-20 while alcohol related fatalities have increased 4 percent.
- In 2001, 45 percent of those who died in speed-related crashes were youth (aged 15-20).
- States with nighttime driving restrictions show crash

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reductions of up to 60 percent during restricted hours.

- Graduated licensing has been shown to reduce crashes by young drivers.

## How Does Graduated Licensing Work?

In the mid-1990s, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the National Safety Council, the National Transportation Safety Board, and NHTSA met to establish a national model for graduated driver licensing. By establishing a national model, the various traffic safety groups sought to provide guidelines for States considering a graduated driver licensing system.

The three stages of the graduated licensing system include specific components and restrictions to introduce driving privileges gradually to beginning drivers. Novice drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior during each stage of licensing before advancing to the next level.

Each stage includes recommended components and restrictions for States to consider when implementing a graduated licensing system. Examples of components and restrictions of each stage include:

### Stage 1: Learner's Permit

- State's minimum age for a learner's permit.
- Pass vision and knowledge tests, including rules of the road, signs, and signals.
- Complete basic vehicle skills training.
- Licensed adult (who is at least 21 years old) required in the vehicle at all times.

- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Teenage passenger limitations.
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Permit is distinctive from other driver licenses.
- Must remain crash and conviction-free for at least six months to advance to the next level.
- Parental certification of practice hours.

### Stage 2: Intermediate (Provisional) License

- Complete Stage 1.
- State's minimum age.
- Pass a behind-the-wheel road test.
- Complete advanced driver education training (e.g., safe driving decision making, risk education, etc.).
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Licensed adult required in the vehicle during late-night hours (e.g., nighttime driving restriction).
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Driver improvement actions are initiated at lower point level than for regular drivers.
- Provisional license is distinctive from a regular license.
- Teenage passenger restrictions.
- Must remain crash and conviction-free for at least 12 consecutive months to advance to the next stage.
- Supervised practice.

### Stage 3: Full Licensure

- Complete Stage 2.
- State's minimum age.
- Zero alcohol while driving.

## How Many States Have a Graduated License System?

Thirty-four States plus the District of Columbia have matched or exceeded all component parts of the model GDL law adopted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), and the National Safety Council (NSC). These States are: California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Since 1996, 40 States have changed their licensing laws pertaining to young novice drivers. Evaluations in Michigan and North Carolina are showing a positive effect on reducing the number of crashes involving teenage drivers.

## How Effective is Graduated Licensing?

Evaluations clearly show the benefits of adopting graduated licensing laws and components. Florida's graduated driver licensing law resulted in a 9 percent reduction in crashes for drivers who were 16 and 17 years old. Ongoing research in Michigan, and North Carolina has shown a 26 percent and 25 percent reduction respectively in crashes involving 16-year-old drivers. Ohio has shown similar positive results. Components adopted in the late 1970s and early 1980s also had positive effects.

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For instance, California reported a 5 percent reduction in crashes and a 10 percent reduction in traffic convictions for 16- and 17-year-old drivers, while Oregon saw a 16 percent reduction in crashes for male drivers aged 16 and 17.

Nova Scotia reported a 24 percent reduction in crashes involving 16-year-old drivers while a preliminary report from Ontario, Canada, cites a 31 percent reduction in crashes for all drivers 15 to 19 years old.

## Incentive Grant Program

On May 22, 1998, Congress passed H.R. 2400, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21 made substantial changes to the existing Section 410 alcohol incentive grant program. States have qualified for a “Programmatic Basic Grant” if they submit materials demonstrating that they meet five out of seven grant criteria. One grant criterion is a new graduated driver’s licensing system. To rely on this system as one criterion to qualify for a grant, a State must have a three-stage program that includes a learner’s permit stage (Stage I), an intermediate (or restricted) license stage (Stage II), and a final stage, whereby the driver receives an unrestricted license (Stage III). Each stage has a minimum length and threshold requirements for testing before advancing to the next stage. Drivers with Stage I learner’s permits and Stage II intermediate licenses must abide by the State’s seat belt use laws and zero tolerance laws if they are under the age of 21, and they must remain crash and conviction-free for the duration of the licensing phase. During Stage I, permit holders may not operate a motor vehicle at any time (day or night) unless accompanied by a licensed driver who is at least 21

years old. During Stage II, drivers may not operate a motor vehicle during certain nighttime hours unless accompanied by a licensed driver who is at least 21 years old or covered by a State-approved exception to this restriction. These hours are to be specified by the State, and they must cover some period of time between the hours of 10:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M. Permits and licenses issued at all three stages must be distinguishable from all others.

## Who Supports Graduated Licensing?

The following organizations have publicly supported a graduated driver licensing system:

- Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
- Allstate Insurance
- American Academy of Family Physicians
- American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators
- American Automobile Association (AAA)
- American Automobile Manufacturers Association
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS)
- Brain Injury Association
- Centers for Disease Control
- General Federation of Women’s Clubs
- Governors Highway Safety Association
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
- International Association of Chiefs of Police
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)

- National Association of Independent Insurers
- National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health
- The Society of Trauma Nurses
- National Association of Orthopedic Nurses
- National Commission Against Drunk Driving
- National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
- National Safety Council
- National Sheriffs’ Association
- National Transportation Safety Board
- Police Executive Research Forum
- USAA Insurance

## What Products and Services Are Available?

- *Beginning Teenage Drivers*. DOT HS 809 177.
  - Consultation on provisions and implementation of graduated licensing systems, from AAMVA and NHTSA.
  - Testimony before state legislatures, from AAMVA and NHTSA.
  - *Saving Teenage Lives: The Case for Graduated Driver Licensing*. DOT HS 808 801, 1998.
  - *Graduated Driver Licensing: Q&A*. DOT HS 808 856.
  - *Graduated Licensing System: Learning the Skill, Earning the Privilege*. 2-volume resource package, AAA Government Relations.
  - *Young Drivers: The High-Risk Years*. Video, IIHS.
  - A sample graduated driver licensing system law.
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- *Research Agenda for an Improved Novice Driver Education Program.* Report to Congress, NHTSA, May 1994.
- Evaluation studies from Florida, California, Maryland, Oregon, and New Zealand showing the benefits of graduated licensing; available from NHTSA.

## Information Sources

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