

# ★ ★ ★ ★ Teen Driver Safety

## Characteristics of Fatal Crashes Involving 16- and 17-Year-Old Drivers with Teenage Passengers

### *The Situation*

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers in the United States
- Recent [AAA Foundation research](#) found that risk of death in a crash for 16- and 17-year-old drivers increases by 44% when carrying one passenger younger than 21, doubles with two, and quadruples with three or more, compared with driving alone
- Another [AAA Foundation study](#) found that potentially-distracting loud conversation and horseplay were substantially more common with multiple teens in the vehicle than with siblings or adult passengers
- Most states have enacted passenger restrictions as part of graduated driver licensing systems, and studies indicate these limits reduce crashes

### *The Study: [Characteristics of Fatal Crashes Involving 16- and 17-Year-Old Drivers with Teenage Passengers](#)*

- Documents the proportion of fatal crashes of 16- and 17-year-old drivers in which passengers were present in relation to the age, sex, and number of passengers
- Examines the characteristics of these crashes in relation to specific combinations of passengers
- Provides state-by-state summary data [note: Virginia excluded from study due to lack of passenger-related data]
- Utilizes data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) on fatal crashes occurring in years 2005-2010 that involved a 16- or 17-year-old driver of a passenger vehicle

### *Key Findings – Numbers Breakdown*

- 9,578 16- and 17-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes during the years 2005-2010 (3,667 16-year-olds; 5,911 17-year-olds; excluding Virginia)
  - 42% had at least one teen passenger (and no passengers of any other ages)
  - This proportion remained consistent over the study period, despite overall teen traffic fatality reductions, and the introduction or strengthening in numerous states of passenger restrictions for novice teen drivers in this time



Teens have the highest crash rate of any group in the United States.

- Of 16- and 17-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had teen passengers (and no passengers of other ages):
  - 56% had one passenger
  - 24% had two
  - 20% had three or more
- Most often, the teen passengers were the same sex as the driver and within one year of the driver's age

### ***Key Findings: Characteristics of Crashes***

- Among fatal crashes involving 16- and 17-year-old drivers, several risk factors were generally more prevalent when teen passengers (ages 13-19) were present than when the driver was alone, and increased as the number of passengers increased. For example:
  - Prevalence of **speeding** increased from 30% to 44% and 48% with zero, two, and three or more teen passengers, respectively
  - Prevalence of **late-night driving** (11 p.m. to 5 a.m.) increased from 17% to 22% and 28% with zero, two, and three or more teen passengers, respectively
  - Prevalence of **alcohol use** increased from 13% to 17% and 18% with zero, two, and three or more teen passengers, respectively
- All risk factors were more common among male drivers than females
- Except for lack of valid license, all risk factors were least prevalent when an adult aged 30 or older was present in the vehicle, which suggests a protective influence that adults have on teen drivers when they ride as passengers

### ***Useful Resources***

AAA and the AAA Foundation have developed the following teen driver resources:

- [TeenDriving.AAA.com](http://TeenDriving.AAA.com) – This AAA site provides state-specific information to help parents and their teens navigate the learning-to-drive process. Tailored content guides families through each step in the process, from teaching safe behaviors even before teens get learner's permits to keeping parents involved as teens begin driving on their own.
- [Driver-Zed](#) – This interactive risk-management training tool is designed to help teens recognize how to react in a variety of driving scenarios.
- [AAA StartSmart](#) – AAA StartSmart is an online program designed to help families get through the crucial period when teens are learning to drive, through a series of videos and e-newsletters based on a proven program from the National Institutes of Health. A key component is the AAA Parent-Teen Driving Agreement.
- [Dare To Prepare](#) – Dare to Prepare is a 90-minute pre-permit presentation for parents and teens to provide critical information families need to know before teens take the wheel. This presentation walks attendees through the steps necessary to obtain a permit and a driver's license, and offers useful tools to help families through the learning-to-drive process. A shorter online version of the program is now available at [www.TeenDriving.AAA.com](http://www.TeenDriving.AAA.com).

For more information about teen driver safety and the AAA Foundation's research in this area, please visit [www.AAAFoundation.org](http://www.AAAFoundation.org) and [www.TeenDriving.AAA.com](http://www.TeenDriving.AAA.com).