
Teen Driving: Messaging and Background

Safe teen driving, tips for parents, underage drinking

Talking Points

Traffic crashes are the leading killer of Minnesota teens and a major reason for this is teens are our most inexperienced drivers on the road. They take the most risks and they also have the lowest belt use rate. It is so important for parents to really stay involved in their teens driving, just as you would stay involved in their grades and other activities.

It's important for parents to establish clear, sensible rules with teen drivers to reduce their exposure to risky situations. Realize the laws limiting nighttime driving, passenger limitations, cell phone bans. Remember, it's illegal for new teen drivers to use cell phones while driving and it is illegal for all drivers to text.

Another key to safe teen driving ultimately comes down to teens speaking up in a vehicle to stop unsafe behaviors. We've all been there before as teens where we've packed into a vehicle for a night on the town. We need teens to use their voice and speak up if the driver is driving too fast, not paying attention/texting; if others aren't belted, or if passengers are being too rowdy. Parents need to do their part to encourage this.

Distracted driving is a serious issue for all drivers, but especially for teen drivers who are so inexperienced behind the wheel. Teens are more likely to engage in distracted driving or risky behaviors such as texting (which is illegal); carry rowdy passengers, eating, scrolling the iPod or searching radio stations.

The good news is teen deaths are dropping over the last few years. But that doesn't mean teens still aren't a risk to themselves or other drivers — they certainly are. To maintain a positive trend of fewer teen deaths we really need parents to establish rules with their teens to reduce their exposure to risky situations. And, we need teens to understand that their lives can be ruined in an instant if they make poor driving decisions.

We are about a year and a half into the new graduated driver's licensing law, and while we can't quite yet determine how effective this law has been (it will take a few years of data), we do know this law is absolutely important to give teens the time to gain experience and hone their driving skills while not being exposed to risky situations — such as too many teen passengers or driving late at night.

It's important for parents to be a positive role model behind the wheel: belt up, drive at safe speeds, put down the cell, don't drive aggressively, and never drive after you've been drinking.

—MORE—

Background facts/Accompanying Messages

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for teens, the good news teen deaths are dropping — 31 in 2008, down from 41 in 2007 and 65 in 2006.

The main reasons that teens are overrepresented in traffic crashes: inexperience, distractions (cell phones, teen passengers), risk taking such as speeding, and seat belt non-use.

The role teen passengers play in a vehicle is significant — adding just one passenger increases the risk of death by 39 percent for 16 year-old drivers. In the last three years, 64 percent of fatal crashes involving teen drivers (ages 16–17) had passengers present in the teen driver’s vehicle.

A DPS informal survey of teens found that teens said texting was their biggest distraction while driving.

GDL

A nighttime driving limitation during the first six months of licensure prohibits teens from driving midnight –5 a.m., unless the teen is accompanied by a licensed driver age 25 or older. Other exceptions include driving between home and place of employment, for employment purposes, and to/from home and a school event for which the school has not provided transportation. Mile for mile, 16 and 17 year-olds are about three times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash at night than during the day.

Passenger limitation for the first six months of licensure allows only one passenger under the age of 20, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. During the second six months of licensure, no more than three passengers under the age of 20 are permitted, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Passengers under age 20 who are members of the immediate family are permitted for both periods.

No Cell Phone Law

Teens with a provisional license cannot use a cell phone at all while driving. A provisional license is what a new driver has during first year of licensure.

No Texting/Emailing/Web Access

No drivers of any age can text, send/read emails or use wireless devices while driving

Underage Drinking

Not a Drop Law —Driving minors cited for any amount of alcohol use will lose their license from 30 to 180 days, and face up to a \$700 fine and 90 days in jail.

Vanessa’s Law — Minors will lose their license until age 18 if they are arrested for DWI or involved in an impaired driving crash or crime.

Trying to purchase alcohol with a fake ID can result in a loss of driving privileges for at least 90 days.

Providing alcohol to minors is a serious issue with serious consequences. Adults who provide alcohol to minors can be held responsible and suffer serious criminal, legal, and financial consequences including: felony charges and prison time in the case of death; civil liability charges in the case of injury, property damage or death; and increased insurance rates. In January, a 21- year-old Wisconsin man was charged with providing alcohol to Minnesota teens and is facing felony charges and prison time. The teen driver later crashed near Stillwater, killing one of her passengers.