

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the goal of the Dying2Drive program?**

Dying2Drive aims to reduce the number of car crashes and save lives of teenagers driving on Virginia's roadways through education and awareness of risky driving behavior. The program also targets parents, educators, businesses, and law enforcement as key players in influencing teens to drive safely and responsibly.

### **How serious is the problem of risky teen driving behavior?**

The following statistics underscore the severity and the consequences of unsafe teen driving:

- Car crashes are the leading cause of death among 16-19 year olds.
- The economic impact of police-reported fatal and non-fatal car crashes involving teen drivers in 2002 was \$40.8 billion.
- In 2002, 5,933 teenagers died in the U.S. from injuries sustained in car crashes.
- In Virginia in FY2003, there were 144 fatal car crashes involving teens (an 8% increase over 2002), 163 individual teen fatalities (a 5% increase over 2002), and 241 injuries (a 40% increase over 2002), according to data from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles.

### **Why are crash rates so high for teens?**

A number of factors contribute to high crash rates among teen drivers:

- Teens lack the psychological and physiological maturity to safely manage risk and hazardous driving conditions.
- Teens are taught to drive under optimal conditions and don't have experience with potentially hazardous situations.
- Teens are at a life stage in which they believe they are invincible (the "it won't happen to me" mindset), and are more likely than older drivers to underestimate dangerous situations.
- Teens are attracted to risk and are less likely to take safety precautions, such as wearing seatbelts.

### **What are the leading causes of car crashes among teens?**

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the leading causes of car crashes involving teens include:

- Driver inexperience,
- Risk-taking behavior,
- High-risk situations (e.g., inclement weather, night driving),
- Alcohol and drug use, and
- Not wearing a seatbelt.

Distractions in the car - such as cell phones, music, and passengers - also contribute significantly to car crashes involving teens. A report from the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles reveals that, in FY2003, driver inattention/distraction caused 15% of all teen driver crashes in Virginia.

### **What are Virginia's policies for teen drivers?**

The Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles has several policies specific to teen drivers, including:

- 50 required hours of driver education (a combination of in-classroom and behind the wheel training).
- 40 required hours of adult-supervised driving.
- A curfew law for drivers under 18.
- Passenger restrictions for drivers under 18.
  - Driver improvement clinics for drivers under 18 who commit a first-time demerit point violation. (A second demerit point conviction will suspend the teen's license for 90 days; a third conviction will suspend the teen's license for one year or until they are 18, whichever is longer).
  - Parents' ability to cancel a teens' license for six months without cause.

For more information about Virginia's rules for teen drivers, see the Virginia driving manual.

### **Are driver's education programs in high schools effective at improving driving behavior?**

High school driver's education programs can teach driving skills and raise awareness about the consequences of major risks, such as drinking and driving. However, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), high school driver's ed program appear to have little affect on changing teen drivers' attitudes - and attitudes are strong indicators of how driving skills are actually employed. To effectively change attitudes and reduce risky behavior among teen drivers, education needs to be combined with parent and community involvement and ongoing behind-the-wheel supervision.

### **Which cars are safest for young drivers?**

While parents may be inclined to choose a new vehicle for their teen driver, teens are actually safest in larger cars with low centers of gravity, small engines, and air bags. Mid- to full-size sedans or station wagons are good choices. Be sure to check the vehicle history before buying and keep the car is tuned-up to ensure reliability.

### **How can parents, educators, and businesses help reduce teen-related car crashes and fatalities?**

You can help keep teens safe on the road in two easy and important ways. First, talk to teens you know about the consequences of unsafe driving. Remind them to focus forward, buckle up, and slow down. Secondly, act as a role model for their driving behavior. Teens are looking to you, literally, for guidance on how to act while driving. When driving with a teen passenger, minimize distractions, don't talk on your cell phone, and keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.

In addition, you can improve teen driver safety by:

- Limiting teen drivers' unsupervised exposure to risky situations, such as dangerous weather conditions and night driving.

- Restricting the number of passengers allowed in the car with the teen driver.
- Enforcing Virginia's curfew law (i.e., drivers under 18 cannot drive between 12 AM and 4 AM). According to IIHS, curfews are proven to reduce crashes among teen drivers.
- Understanding and supporting teen licensing laws.