

Role Models for the Road

Parent Tips

IT'S A NEW YEAR FOR SAFETY!

In 2008, a U.S. Department of Transportation report confirmed that speed is not the major cause of accidents for all drivers. The report quoted a two-and-a-half year study that examined the cause of 5,471 accidents.

What did the report find? Among other things, the analysis revealed that more drivers crashed as a result of crossing the center line (11%) than as a result of speeding (5%). Speeding, in this report, was defined as "too fast for conditions," which was not necessarily above the posted limit. Sounds like good news? Well, not exactly.

Teen drivers still have the highest crash risk of any age group. Per mile traveled, teens have the highest crashes rates from crashes involving property damage only to those that are fatal. The problem is worst among 16 year olds, who have the most limited driving experience and an immaturity that often results in risk-taking behind the wheel. The causes of fatal crashes by 16-year-old drivers as cited in a National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration (NHTSA, <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>) were as follows:

- Driver error -- 78%
- Speeding -- 39%
- Single vehicle crashes -- 52%
- 3 or more occupants in the car -- 29%
- Drivers killed with a Blood Alcohol Content of more than .08 -- 13%

In addition, the study found the following:

- **Driver Error:** Compared with crashes of older drivers, those of 16 year olds more often involve driver error.
- **Speeding:** 16-year-old drivers have a higher rate of crashes in which excessive speed is a factor.
- **Single-Vehicle Crashes:** More of 16-year-olds' fatal crashes involve only the teen's vehicle. Typically these are high-speed crashes in which the driver lost control.

- **Passengers:** 16 year-olds' fatal crashes are more likely to occur when other teenagers are in the car. The risk increases with every additional passenger.
- **Alcohol:** Although this is a problem among drivers of all ages, it's actually less of a problem for 16 year olds. Typically, less than 15% of fatally injured 16-year-old drivers have blood alcohol concentrations greater than of .08. However, alcohol quickly becomes a problem in the later teen years.
- **Night Driving:** This is a high-risk activity for beginners. Per mile driven, the nighttime fatal crash rate for 16-year-olds is about twice as high as during the day.
- **Low Belt Use:** Teenagers generally are less likely than adults to use safety belts.

Parents: It's a new year and a fresh opportunity to stress safety on the roads. Take time to discuss the facts and figures with your teen driver and be sure to drive safely yourselves by setting a good example!

A FEW MORE TIPS . . .

Drowsy driving causes more than 10,000 crashes each year, leading to 40,000 injuries and 1,550 deaths, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The combination of sleepiness, inexperience, and a tendency to drive at night and in the early morning hours often puts young adults at risk for drowsy driving crashes.

Parents are the most influential voices in their teens' driving behaviors and beginning drivers are more likely to drive safely when they are presented with family driving rules that are enforced, such as: minimum sleep requirements in order to drive, no driving after 10 p.m., and no cell phone use, including text messaging, while driving.

**PARTNERS FOR SAFE
TEEN DRIVING**
A COMMUNITY HEALTH INITIATIVE

For additional information go to
www.SafeTeenDriving.org
Prince William County Public Schools
Department of Motor Vehicles