

Reducing Motor Vehicle Crashes Involving Young Drivers

Programs and Strategies

Based on an extensive review of tried and tested strategies, the following is a summary of those strategies most likely to be effective in reducing injuries and fatalities involving young drivers or occupants of motor vehicles driven by young drivers. (D = documented, P = probably, U = unknown.)

Implement or Improve Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Systems

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) systems provide the foundation for protecting young drivers, their passengers and other road users. Most states have implemented GDL systems, but simply having a GDL program in place, however, is not sufficient. It is important for GDL systems to include the most beneficial risk-reducing restrictions.

- **Enact a full graduated driver licensing system.** GDL is designed to provide beginning drivers with substantial driving practice under the safest possible conditions, exposing them to more risky situations (e.g., night driving) only as experience is gained over time. **(D)**
- **Require at least 6 months of supervised driving for beginners, starting at age 16.** Substantial amounts of practice are needed – at least 6 months or more – before a novice driver begins to develop the savvy required to be a proficient and safe driver. Driving with an adult supervisor enables novice drivers to gain needed “real world” driving experience in a reasonably safe fashion. **(D)**
- **Implement a night driving restriction that begins at 9 p.m.** A disproportionately high number of young driver fatal crashes occur between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Beginning drivers should not be exposed to the most risky driving conditions. **(D)**
- **Implement a passenger restriction allowing no young passengers.** Carrying teen passengers greatly increases the risk of a serious crash for young drivers. Passenger restrictions for the first several months of unsupervised driving eliminate the distractions that teen passengers inevitably create. **(P)**
- **Prohibit cell phone use by drivers with a GDL license.** Recent research suggests that using a cell phone is associated with a fourfold increase in the likelihood of a serious crash among drivers of all ages. Reducing this risk for inexperienced drivers is an appropriate goal for a graduated licensing system. **(U)**

Publicize, Enforce and Adjudicate Laws Pertaining to Young Drivers

Some laws pertain specifically to young drivers. Other laws that govern all drivers are particularly important for young drivers. Enhanced enforcement of these laws will benefit young drivers.

- **Publicize and enforce GDL restrictions.** To the extent that teens do not comply with protective restrictions under GDL, the safety benefits of GDL will be reduced. **(U)**
- **Publicize and enforce laws pertaining to underage drinking and driving.** Both minimum drinking age laws and “zero tolerance” laws have proven effective in reducing alcohol-related crashes and fatalities involving young drivers. **(D)**

- **Publicize and enforce seatbelt laws.** Seat belt use is lower among young drivers than adult drivers. Well-publicized enforcement programs and primary seat belt laws have increased belt use for all drivers, including teen drivers. **(D)**

Assist Parents in Managing Their Teens' Driving

Parents are inescapably involved in the licensing process of their children even though they may not recognize the extent of their potential influence. Efforts to assist parents in this role can benefit teen drivers.

- **Facilitate parental supervision of learners.** More effective supervision of teen drivers holds substantial promise for further reducing young driver crashes. Simply distributing educational/advisory materials to parents is insufficient. Persuasive techniques that encourage parents to make use of materials and guidance are needed. **(P)**
- **Facilitate parental management of intermediate drivers.** Teen drivers experience a dramatic increase in crashes when they first begin driving alone. Parent-teen driving agreements and new technologies for monitoring teen drivers have the potential to reduce young driver crashes during this high risk period. **(U)**
- **Encourage selection of safer vehicles for young drivers.** Teens often drive vehicles that are less likely to have important safety features. A program that encourages the greatest possible use of safer vehicles by young drivers holds substantial promise for reducing deaths and injuries among teen drivers and their passengers. **(U)**

Improve Young Driver Training

Although there is no evidence that formal driver education classes are effective in reducing subsequent crash rates among novice drivers, there are a number of promising improvements that can be made in the training of young drivers administered by states.

- **Improve content and delivery of driver education/training.** The model followed by current driver education programs in the U.S. was developed in the late 1940s. There is widespread belief that both what is taught and how it is taught can be improved significantly, with the promise that young driver crashes can be reduced as the result. Doing so will require a substantially more ambitious effort than simply adding content to the current curriculum. **(U)**

Employ School-based Strategies

Nearly all beginning drivers are in high school. This affords an opportunity to adopt strategies to reduce young driver crashes by implementing policies that take advantage of this natural grouping in both space and time to alter that environment.

- **Eliminate early high school start times.** Recent developments in understanding human sleep needs indicate that teenagers need to be asleep in the early morning hours. As a result, school systems in the U.S. have begun to move school start times back to 8:30 or later. This promises to reduce young driver crashes. **(U)**

Source: Goodwin AH, Foss RD, Mayhew D, & Sohn J (2007). *A guide for reducing collisions involving young drivers*. Washington, DC: Transportation Research Board.