

Graduated Driver Licensing

Safe States Alliance Supports Sustaining and Strengthening Graduated Driver Licensing for New Drivers.

Graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws are designed to give beginner drivers the needed experience to safely learn the complex skill of driving. GDL is evidenced-based and consists of a three-stage driver's licensing system for beginning drivers:

- (1) Learner Stage – supervised driving, culminating in a driving test;
- (2) Intermediate Stage – limited unsupervised driving in high risk situations; and
- (3) Full Privilege Stage – a standard driver's license.¹

The Safe States Alliance provides leadership and support to state efforts to reduce driving fatalities by supporting strategies to strengthen Graduated Driver Licensing provisions including:

- Base the graduated driver licensing on driving experience, not age.
- Strengthen the Learner period by:
 - Applying it to all first time drivers, regardless of age;
 - Beginning the period no earlier than age 16;
 - Requiring a period 12 months or longer; and
 - Including strategies to strengthen parental or mentor driver involvement in the supervised driving period.
- Lengthen the intermediate stage until at least age 18 and include:
 - Restricting driving between 10:00 PM and 5:00 AM¹; and
 - Limiting the number of passengers to one during the learner period.
- Increased efforts to improve parental or guardian knowledge of state driving laws to make them effective teachers for their beginning driver.

Background: Graduated Driver Licensing Laws Can Prevent Crashes

Beginning Drivers Are at Greatest Risk for Motor Vehicle Crashes

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens in the United States.² In 2010, seven teens ages 16 to 19 died every day from motor vehicle injuries and almost 282,000 were treated and released from emergency departments for injuries suffered in motor-vehicle crashes. Per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are three times more likely than older drivers to be in a fatal crash.³

Inexperience behind the wheel and immaturity are the two factors putting young drivers at greater risk. Young drivers tend to overestimate their own driving abilities and at the same time, underestimate the dangers on the road. Young drivers are more likely than older drivers to take risks such as speeding and, because of their inexperience behind the wheel; they are much less able to effectively handle hazardous driving situations.⁴

¹ Restricted hours may require adjustment based on the specific geographic region to which GDL laws apply.

Graduated Driver Licensing Laws Are Effective

Graduated driver licensing laws delay full licensure while allowing teens to obtain driving experience under realistic, but safe conditions.

GDL laws are effective at reducing crashes among novice drivers. Evaluations of Graduated Driver's Licensing (GDL) programs in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand have consistently found that GDL reduces the crash risk among teen drivers. Studies show that most comprehensive GDL systems are associated with reductions of 38% and 40% in fatal and non-fatal crashes, respectively, among 16-year-old drivers.⁵

Elements of a Strong GDL Law

While all states and the District of Columbia have a three-stage GDL system, components in some states are stronger than others. Elements of a strong GDL include:

- *Learner's Stage - Beginning no earlier than age 16 and lasting six months:* starting the process earlier and earlier licensing are both associated with higher fatal crash rates. Research suggests that the fatal crash rate for teenagers is lower in states where laws delay the minimum age at which teenagers can get learner's permits.⁶ One study examining fatal crash rates for drivers aged 15-17 in states with different minimum learner's permit and intermediate licensing ages found that as age decreased, fatal crash rates increased.⁷
- *Supervised driving period lasts 12 month or longer:* this is a critical time to receive coaching and support while the novice driver gains driving skill and confidence. The evidence is inescapable that a 12-month learner period is important and needed to provide more experience and skill development for novice drivers. The rate of first time crashes for new drivers drops off after 12 months of driving.⁸
- *GDL applies to all first time drivers, regardless of age:* The gains in reducing teen driver crashes achieved by GDL are being undermined by increases in late teen crashes. A growing number of teens are waiting until they turn 18 to acquire a driver's license and are missing the benefits of the GDL experience. High crash and fatality rates during the first 12 months of driving are consistent across first time drivers, regardless of age. Driving is a skill that is greatly enhanced by the coaching and mentoring provided by an experienced driver during the supervised driving period.
- *Includes strategies to strengthen parental/guardian driver involvement in the supervised driving period:* The active involvement of a mentor during the supervised driving period is key for skill development in a novice driver. Strategies to improve the preparation and skills of the driving supervisor hold promise for increasing the effectiveness of the GDL system.^{9 10 11 12}
- *Intermediate stage - nighttime driving restriction between 10:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.:* fatal crash risk is higher at night for drivers of all ages, but especially for young drivers. Teen drivers are at greater risk during this time because they are likely to have less practice driving at night and the task of driving is more difficult in the dark.¹³ The rate of nighttime fatal crashes for 16-17-year-old drivers is 23 crashes per 100 million miles travelled, compared to a rate of 5.5 crashes per

100 million miles travelled for daytime fatal crashes. Limits on nighttime driving are associated with a 40-60% crash reduction during the restricted hours.^{14 15 16 17}

- *Intermediate stage -no more than one teen passenger*: restrictions on teen passengers are crucial, because passenger presence is such a big contributor to teen crashes.^{18 19} Fatal crash risk for teen drivers increases incrementally with one, two, three or more passengers.²⁰ Strong passenger restrictions for drivers in the intermediate stage are effective at preventing teen crashes.^{21 22 23 24} A national study found a 21% reduction in the fatal crash rate for 15-17 year-olds when beginners were prohibited from driving with any teenagers in their vehicles versus allowing two or more. Allowing only one teen passenger reduced the rate by 7%.²⁵ A study of teens involved in serious crashes found that, compared with driving alone, teen drivers with passengers were more likely to take risks and more likely to be distracted.²⁶

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