

Teen Driver Safety In Nebraska

Nebraska's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) system was implemented in 1998 and updated in 2008. Since implementation of the law, teen crashes resulting in injury or death have dropped by 56%.¹ GDL laws work because they introduce teens to various driving situations to gain experience while keeping them out of high risk situations.

Teen Driver Statistics

In 2016, 12 Nebraska teens ages 13-19 lost their lives due to motor vehicle crashes. This is the leading cause of death and injury for Nebraska teens. According to the Nebraska Department of Transportation Highway Safety Office:

- 100% of the 2016 teen traffic fatalities in Nebraska (drivers and passengers ages 13-19) were not wearing seatbelts.³
- Nationally, 55% of teens who died from a motor vehicle crash were not wearing their seat belts.²
- 26% of teen drivers that crashed were using a cell phone³
- While teen drivers make up 7% of all licensed drivers across the state, they accounted for 21% of all reported crashes in 2016.³
- 98% of Nebraskan teens surveyed identified distractions like texting while driving a risk. However 68% of the same teens admitted to texting while driving "some or a lot" in the past month.⁴

How Do Teen Motor Vehicle Crashes Affect Nebraska?

According to the 2013 Nebraska Teen Driver Report, when comparing teens to other age groups, Nebraska teens are dying in motor vehicle crashes at three times the rate of the average adult. An unrestrained teen had double the average emergency room charges compared to a restrained teen (\$8,184.89 vs \$3,624.90); hospital inpatient charges averaged \$5,000 higher for an unrestrained teen.⁵

The projected cost estimate for Nebraska teen drivers (age 15-19) involved in motor vehicle crashes in 2016 was \$131,866,600. The cost estimate includes wage and productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative expenses, motor vehicle damage, and employer costs.⁶

Strategies to Decrease Teen-related Motor Vehicle Crashes

Comprehensive GDL (Graduated Driver Licensing) Laws

Every state has GDL provisions in place. These provisions have significantly reduced teen crash rates. States with the most comprehensive GDL provisions see reductions of all types of crashes in the age groups directly affected by the rules.⁷ Current GDL best practices as developed by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) are:

Licensing

- Learner stage entry age of 16, 1 year in length, 80-120 driving hours and driver's education.

- Intermediate stage entry age of 17, 1 year in length and advanced drivers education.
- Unrestricted stage entry age of 18.

Intermediate Stage Driving Restrictions

- Unsupervised night time driving restriction starting at 9-10 p.m. and ending no earlier than 5a.m;
- Zero to one teenage passenger with the exception of supervising driver and family.
- Seat belt requirements for driver and passengers;
- Zero alcohol tolerance;
- No use of phone/electronic devices;
- License plate identifiers (decal) required to improve compliance.⁸

All driving restrictions are enforced as a primary action.

Each restriction plays a role in reducing teen related motor vehicle crashes including lower rates of insurance collision claims among 16-17 year olds.⁹

Nebraska GDL

Licensing

- School Learner Permit at age 14 years
- School Permit at age 14 years 3 months
- Learner Permit at age 15 years of age
- Provisional Operators Permit (POP) at age 16 years
- Unrestricted license entry age of 17 years

Nebraska teens can either log 50 hours of driving or take a driver education course to obtain their permit. They must also pass required testing at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Permit Driving Restrictions

- A holder of a School Permit may only transport family members who reside with them to the school attended by the holder;
- A holder of a Provisional Operators Permit (POP) shall not drive from 12 a.m. to 6 a.m. unless from school, school activities or work;
- A holder of a POP is limited to one passenger younger than 19 who is not a family member for the first six months;
- No use of any type of interactive wireless communication device;
- Zero tolerance for driving while under the influence;
- All occupants must wear a seat belt.

All Nebraska driving restrictions are enforced as a secondary action.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) GDL calculator, if Nebraska matched the best practices in GDL components (permit age 16, 70 practice hours, license age

17 years, 8 p.m. night driving restriction, no passengers), it is estimated that there would be a 27% reduction in collision claims and a 45% reduction in fatal crashes.¹⁰

Parental Involvement

According to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Center for Injury Research and Prevention, involved parents who set rules and monitor their teens' driving behavior in a supportive way can lower their teens' crash risk by half.¹¹ Parents can be more engaged through use of a parent-teen driving agreement such as Checkpoints, increase their understanding of GDL provisions, enforce current GDL laws to increase compliance, and role model safe driving behaviors such as wearing a seat belt and obeying traffic laws.¹²

Peer-to-Peer Education

Peer-to-Peer education is an intervention in which teens develop and deliver messages to their peers in order to create awareness, increase knowledge and change behavior. One such program, Teens in the Driver Seat, focuses solely on traffic safety and addresses the most common risks to teens while driving: driving at night, distractions (passenger, cell phone use, etc.), speeding, not wearing a seat belt, and alcohol use. Analysis of the program indicate awareness of common risks improved 40 to 200%, seat belt use averaged 11% higher, and cell phone use/texting 30% lower at "program schools" compared to a control group of schools at which the program was never deployed.¹³

Nebraska has been implementing the Teens in the Driver Seat program since the 2013-2014 school year. In the 2017-2018 school year, a total of 32 Nebraska high schools are implementing the program. Every year, a teen driving experiences survey is conducted to track progress in the area of teen driver behavior and knowledge. A three year trend report of the program is showing promising results.¹⁴ The eight schools that had three years of consecutive data showed a 9.2% reduction in the number of students who rode in a vehicle with a driver who had been drinking alcohol, an 8.0% reduction in the number of students who drove a vehicle with passengers who did not wear a seat belt, and a 7.2% reduction in the number of students who drove without wearing a seatbelt.

Driver's Education

A study of more than 150,000 Nebraska teen drivers was conducted by the Nebraska Prevention Center for Alcohol and Drug Abuse, University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The study compared teens who took driver education courses to those that logged 50 hours of supervised driving. Results showed teens that took driver education courses were less likely to be involved in crashes or to commit traffic violations during their first two years of driving compared to teens who completed 50 hours of practice driving under the supervision of a parent or other adult.¹⁵

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