

2013

NEBRASKA TEEN DRIVER REPORT

Department of Health & Human Services
DHHS
NEBRASKA



There are many exciting things that come with the teenage years. Teens become more independent, they move on to high school and they begin one of the most looked-forward-to life events, driving. This is an exciting time for teens. It is also a time for parents and teens to research and communicate what it means to be a safe and responsible driver.

New teen drivers have higher rates of motor vehicle crash-related deaths and injuries compared to more experienced drivers. Factors that contribute to high crash rates are:

- *driving inexperience*
- *brain development*
- *personality*
- *exposure to high risk driving situations such as driving at night*
- *driving distractions such as passengers and the use of a cell phone*
- *speeding*
- *alcohol use*

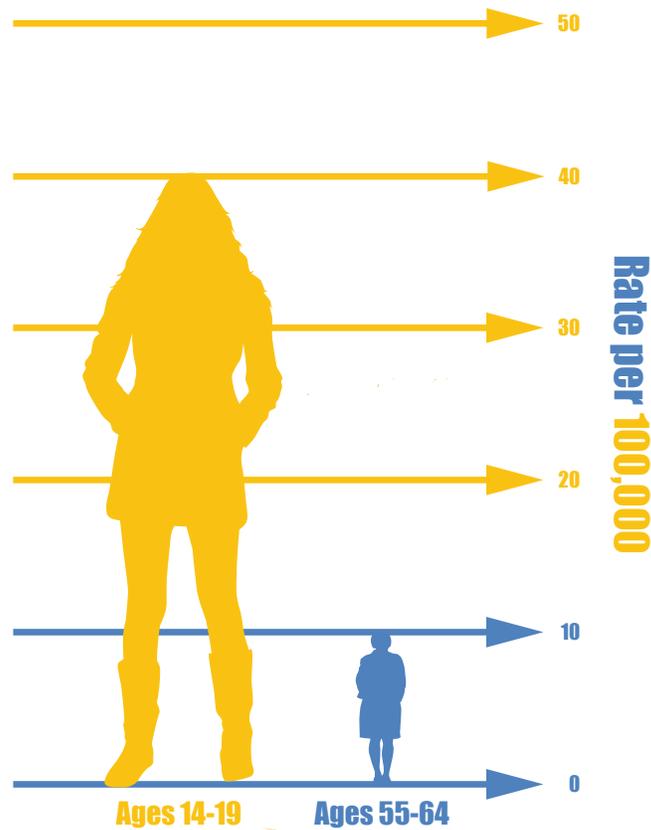
There are many effective strategies including Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) laws, peer-to-peer education, and parental involvement, which work together to help keep teens safe during this time of learning the very complex skill of driving. Through implementation of these evidence-based interventions, this can significantly help teens make it successfully through their most dangerous driving years.

Nebraska Teen Drivers

From 2007-2011, Nebraska teens accounted for 7.6 percent of registered drivers but were involved in 16.5 percent of all reported motor vehicle crashes in Nebraska. Teens are overrepresented in motor vehicle crashes among licensed drivers. According to the Nebraska Health and Human Services Vital Records, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for Nebraska teens. From 2007-2011, there were 122 teens (ages 14-19) killed in motor vehicle crashes in Nebraska.

When comparing teens to other age groups, Nebraska's teens are dying in motor vehicle crashes **three times** the rate of the average adult (figure 1). Although teenagers drive less than those in the oldest age groups, their number of crashes and crash deaths are disproportionately high, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Figure 1:
Teens (age 14-19) at Highest Risk for
Motor Vehicle Crash Fatalities, Nebraska, 2007-2011



On average, 2 teens die on Nebraska roadways EVERY MONTH

Table 1 depicts the percent of non-seat belt use and alcohol use in fatal crashes by age, and the top contributing injury crash factors with overall number of crashes.

Table 1:

Percent of Non-Seat Belt Use and Alcohol Involvement in Fatal Crashes by Age, 2007-2011

Nebraska Teen Driver Crash Profile by Age, 2007-2011

Driver's Age	Fatal Crashes n = 122		Driver's Age	Crashes	Top Contributing Injury Crash Factors
	% Non-Seat Belt Use	% Alcohol Involvement			
14	67%	50%	14	371	Too fast for conditions/Speeding - 19% Over Corrected/steering - 18%
15	50%	17%	15	1323	Too fast for conditions/Speeding -16% Failed to yield - 10% Over-correcting/steering - 10%
16	59%	6%	16	9438	Failure to yield - 11% Too fast for conditions/Speeding - 10%
17	71%	26%	17	9820	Failure to yield - 12% Too fast for conditions/Speeding - 9%
18	77%	54%	18	9716	Failure to yield - 11% Too fast for conditions/Speeding - 9%
19	52%	27%	19	9091	Failure to yield - 11% Evasive Operating - 8%
			Total	39,759	

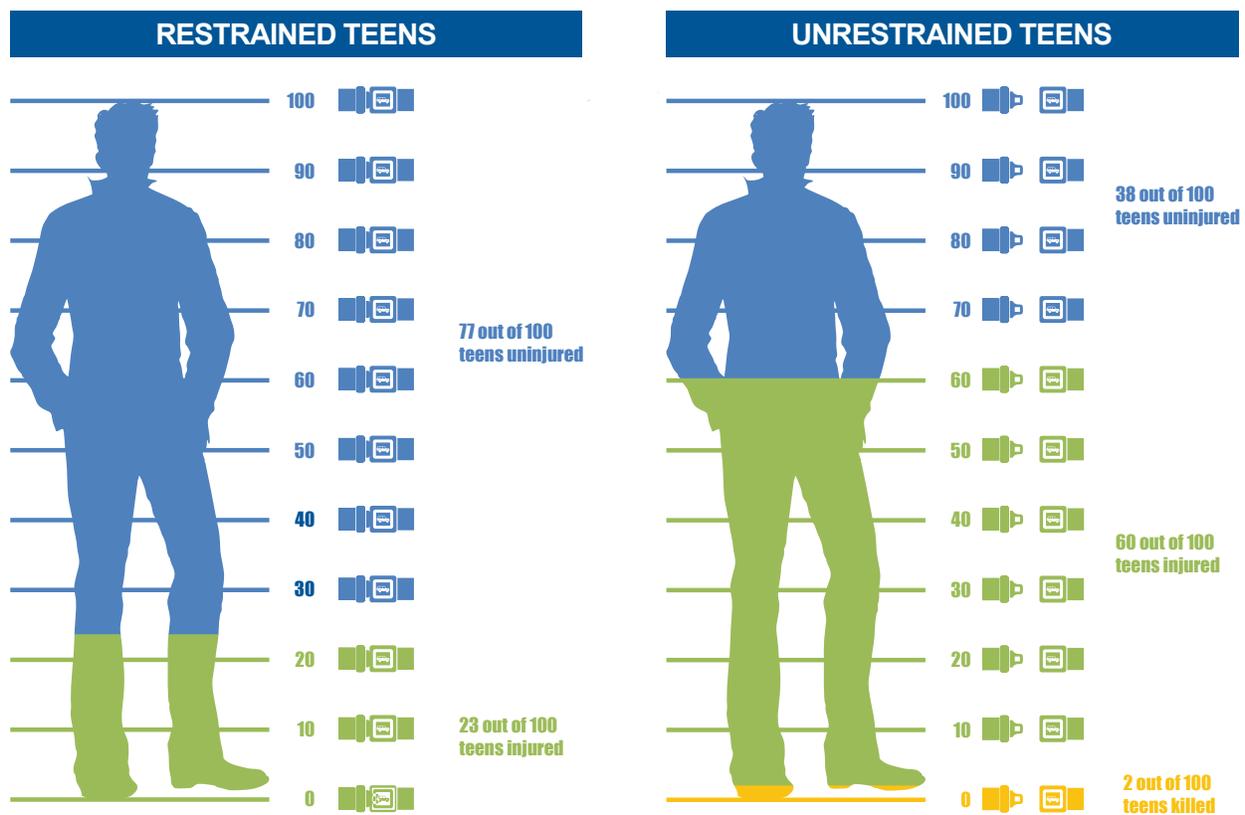


Police crash reports indicated some kind of improper driving in 64 percent of teen driver crashes resulting in injury or death. The five leading driver contributing factors were failure to yield, too fast for conditions/speeding, followed by evasive operating (operating a vehicle in an erratic, reckless, careless, negligent or aggressive manner), inattention/distracted-other/mobile phone distraction, and run off road/lane. Of the teens that were killed in vehicle crashes, 65 percent were not wearing a seat belt. Alcohol was involved in 30 percent of the crashes.

Figure 2 compares injury severity by restraint use for teens involved in a car crash in Nebraska from 2007-2011. Those teens that were unrestrained at the time of a crash were much more likely to be killed and injured compared to teens that were restrained.

Figure 2: Better off Belted

How Restrained and Unrestrained Teen Car Occupants (age 14-19) Fared in Nebraska Crashes, 2007-2011



**Data Source: Nebraska CODES 2007-2011*

The “costs” of a teen being involved in a motor vehicle crash are many. **Table 2** shows the average and median (middle cost) medical charges by seat belt use by emergency department (ED) and inpatient hospital charges.

Table 2:
**Teen Crash Costs: Average & Median
 Medical Charges by Seatbelt Use, 2007-2011**

Seatbelt Use	ED Charge		Inpatient Charge	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
Yes	\$3,624.9	\$969.22	\$46,659.66	\$24,386.01
No	\$8,184.89	\$1,960.61	\$51,929.09	\$30,823.03

An unrestrained teen, had **double** the average emergency department charge compared to a restrained teen. On average, hospital inpatient charges for an unrestrained teen were \$5,000 higher compared to a restrained teen.

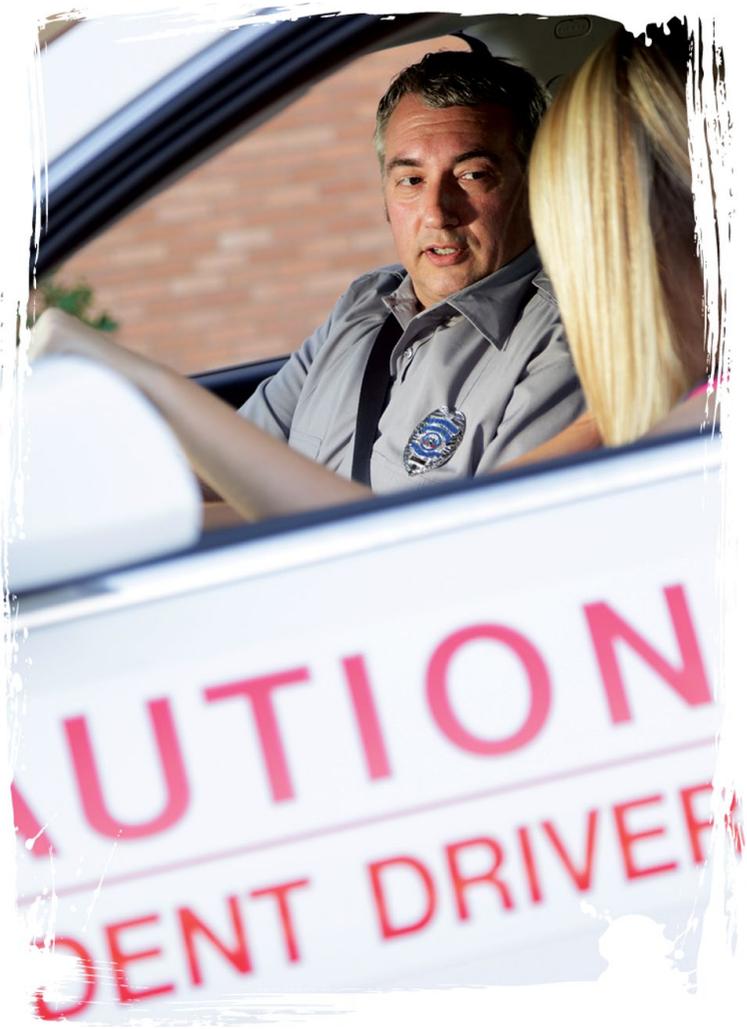
So, how do we manage these contributing risk factors to reduce a teen’s chance of becoming another statistic and keep families and communities from experiencing the “costs” of losing them?

Protective Factors for Teen Drivers

Graduated Driver Licensing provisions, parental involvement and peer-to-peer education all play a role in reducing a teen’s risk of being involved in a crash. Each of these strategies have shown to be effective in reducing teen risky driving and car crashes. The following discusses each of these strategies and how they work.

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL)

GDL laws that are in place in every state have significantly reduced teen crash rates. These laws work because



they keep teen's out of high risk driving situations such as night time driving, driving distracted (passengers and cell phones), drinking and driving as well as requiring the use of seat belts. They also require a minimum amount of driving hours with an adult in order to gain driving experience. GDL laws set a path to slowly introduce teens to increasingly complex driving tasks as they gain experience and mature before gaining full licensure. GDL laws work to reduce teen driver crashes and include the following elements:

Practice/Experience: Practice makes perfect, as the saying goes. That is especially true with new teen drivers. In order for a teen to gain driving experience, they must drive. Most GDL laws require a minimum number of driving hours with an adult and/or completion of driver's education class to gain the driving experience they need. In Nebraska, a teen in the learners permit stage must either have documentation of 50 hours of driving or attend a driver's education class before moving to the next stage.



Getting a license should not be the only indicator that a teen has developed all the driving skills they need to be a safe driver.

Driver's education can be an avenue used to provide teens with the opportunity to learn how to drive with a third party. Many teens have reported that parents are not patient enough, that they may not explain driving skills adequately and don't stay calm. Driver's education instructors can provide these things along with professional education with an independent eye. But it's not only the driving hours that need to be considered; teens need to gain driving experience on various roadway types and in different environments while being supervised by an adult. These situations should include driving on rural and urban roads, during the day and nighttime and under different weather conditions such as snow, fog and rain. Parents need to continue to practice with their teen even after they get their license; getting a license should not be the only indicator that a teen has developed all the driving skills they need to be a safe driver. Other teen driver behavior to consider is good driving judgment, displaying safe driving behaviors (seat belt use, not answering or using the phone while driving) and their personality/mindset when driving.

Seat belts: Teens have lower seat belt use than any other age group. Using a seat belt is the single most effective way to avoid injury or even death during a crash. Seat belts help prevent drivers and passengers from being ejected in a crash. They help the driver maintain control of their vehicle and keep occupants from hitting other occupants and the vehicle interior in the event of a crash. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), seat belts reduce serious crash-related injuries and deaths by 50 percent. Research by CDC and



NHTSA shows states that have primary enforcement of seat belt laws—states where a driver can be ticketed solely for not wearing a seat belt—tend to have higher seat belt usage than states that do not have primary enforcement. In those states with model GDL laws, seat belt use is enforced as a primary offense. Of the teens that were killed in Nebraska from 2007-2011, 65 percent were not wearing their seat belt. Nationally, 58 percent of teens killed in crashes were not wearing a seat belt.¹

Teen passengers: A teen driver with peer passengers is more likely to be distracted. They are also likely to drive more aggressively and perform illegal driving maneuvers compared to those driving with an adult or alone. The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia found that when two or more peer passengers are riding with a teen driver it more than **triples** the risk of a fatal crash. Male teen drivers with peer passengers were almost **six times** more likely to perform an illegal maneuver





and twice as likely to act aggressively before crashing than when driving alone.² Effective GDL laws place passenger restrictions on new teen drivers to reduce this increased distraction and change in driving behavior.

Cell phones/texting: The use of cell phones while driving creates risks for drivers of all ages. Teens are at a higher risk of crashing while using a phone to talk or text while driving because they are less-experienced and their driving judgment hasn't matured. A crash risk is four times higher when a driver uses

a cell phone, whether or not it's hands free.³ Text messaging creates a crash risk **23 times** more likely than driving while not distracted according to the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute.⁴ According to the 2011 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 45 percent of all high school students reported texting or e-mailing while driving during the past 30 days while 49 percent reported speaking on a cell phone while driving during the same time period. Nationally, 33 percent of high school students reported texting or e-mailing while driving in the past 30 days.

Nighttime driving: The fatal crash rate of 16-19 year-olds is nearly **four times** as high at night as it is during the day according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).⁵ According to NHTSA, states with nighttime restrictions on teen driving have reported up to a 60 percent reduction in crashes during the restricted hours.⁶ The IIHS recommends nighttime driving restrictions begin at 10 p.m. or earlier. Nebraska's GDL



nighttime driving restriction begins at midnight. According to Nebraska CODES project, from 2007-2011, 41 percent of fatal crashes involving a teen driver occurred during the hours of 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Alcohol: One of the last parts of the teen brain to develop is the frontal lobe. This part of the brain is responsible for decision making, impulse control, ability to recognize future consequences, capacity to choose bad vs. good actions and suppressing unacceptable social responses. With those things in mind, teens are at a disadvantage when it comes to safer driving. Add alcohol to the mix and it is a deadly combination. The frontal lobe is the first part of the brain to be affected by alcohol. Alcohol inhibits a teen's ability to make good decisions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



states that at all levels of blood alcohol concentration the risk of involvement in a motor vehicle crash is greater for teens than for older drivers.⁷ In Nebraska, anyone younger than 21 is prohibited from driving with any measureable amount of alcohol in their body. Of the fatal crashes among teen drivers from 2007-2011, alcohol was involved in 30 percent of those crashes, even though it is illegal for teens to drink. Also, according to the

2011 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavioral Survey, one in four students in Nebraska reported either being a passenger in a vehicle that was driven by someone drinking, or driving a vehicle while or after drinking themselves during the past 30 days; and 6 percent reported both. Preventing teen drinking and driving can be accomplished by



enhancing the enforcement of existing policies such as the minimum legal drinking age, zero tolerance, graduated driver licensing and parental involvement.⁸

Parental Involvement

Parents play an important role in keeping their teen safe at the wheel. Parents can instill safe driving behaviors in their novice teen driver as well as understand the Graduated Driver Licensing system. For at least two years after licensure, teen drivers are at an increased high risk for a crash. What can parents do?



Parents must be role models for safe driving behaviors by using a seat belt on every trip, obeying traffic laws and not using a cell phone while driving. Instilling safe driving behaviors should begin when children are in car seats, long before they start to drive. Parents should not assume that when their teen receives their license that they are now a safe driver. Teens still need parental oversight and practice to

gain important driving skills. A teenager's attitude and decision making also play an important role in safe driving. Education and training can't change attitudes and decision-making but parents can influence them by staying involved after licensure.

According to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Center for Injury Research and Prevention (CHOP), involved parents who set rules and monitor their teen's driving behavior in a supportive way **can lower their teens' crash risk by half**. The Center's research has also found that teens whose parents act in this way are:

- ➔ *twice as likely to wear seat belts,*
- ➔ *70 percent less likely to drink and drive,*
- ➔ *half as likely to speed,*
- ➔ *30 percent less likely to use a cell phone while driving and,*
- ➔ *significantly less likely to drive with multiple passengers.⁹*

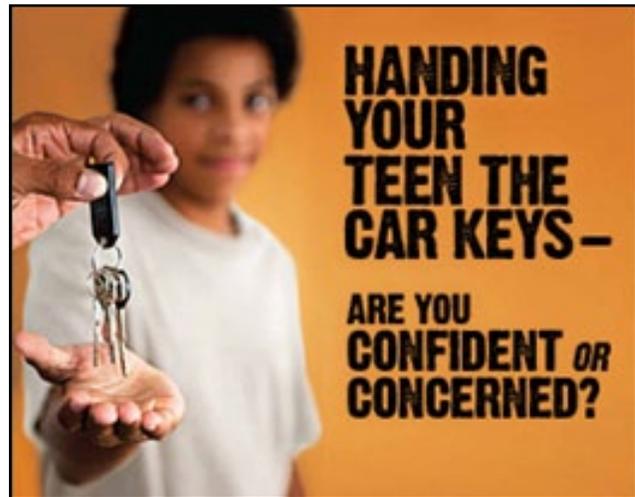
Setting driving rules can be done with parent-teen driving agreements. These parent-teen agreements help parents set clear guidelines/rules and encourage parents to restrict teens from driving under the most dangerous conditions. These agreements allow for adjustments in driving privileges based on the teen's driving experience, judgment and overall driving record. These agreements can complement and go beyond state GDL

law provisions dependent upon a teen's safe driving and compliance with the established rules.

Another parenting tool is limiting primary access to a vehicle for their teen during the first six to 12 months of driving. Teens who are the main driver of a vehicle are more than **twice as likely** to report having been in a crash than teens who share a car with family members.⁹ They are also more likely to speed.¹⁰ If a family chooses to provide a teen with his or her own vehicle, choose one with safety in mind. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety rates vehicles on their safety performance. This information can be found at iihs.org/.

Parent Education

According to the Governor's Highway Safety Association report, *Promoting Parent Involvement in Teen Driving*, elements of a good parent education



CDC Parents Are The Key program

program should include discussion about why teens crash, how and why GDL works and the critical role parent's play in teaching, supporting and managing their new driver. Depending on a state mandate and/or driver's education instructor requirement, parents may be required to attend a parent orientation program. The state of Nebraska doesn't require this, but individual driver's education programs may.

Parents can also receive educational information through social media and websites such as the *Checkpoints* program which addresses those key elements through a parent-teen driving agreement. The CDC campaign, *Parents Are the Key*, offers parents tools and proven steps for reducing teen driving injuries and deaths. Businesses, state





that giving teens some of the responsibility for developing and delivering the message is essential for sparking greater interest, understanding and acceptance among this age group. Peer pressure, which is customarily viewed as a negative, has “practical” implications for prevention and intervention among young drivers.¹¹

and local health departments and other groups can use this campaign to spread the message through posters, facts sheets, social media tools, and more. Other points of educational outreach to parents include the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles, *The Parents Supervised Driving Program*, and pediatrician offices.

Peer-to-Peer Education

Peer-to-peer education is an intervention being deployed throughout many states, including Nebraska, to reach teen drivers. Teens develop and deliver safety messages to their peers in order to create awareness and behavior change within a school setting. States that have implemented such programs have seen decreases in teen crashes, increased knowledge about safe driving behaviors and changes in driving behavior. Research confirms

Policies and Programs that Work in Keeping Teen Drivers Safer

When looking at policies and programs that keep teens safe during their early driving years, research has shown state GDL laws, parental involvement and peer-to-peer education to be effective in reducing teen driver crashes. Below are examples from Nebraska and other state programs that have had a positive impact in reducing teen driver crashes.

Comprehensive Graduated Driver Licensing Laws

The Nebraska GDL was implemented in 1998 and updated in 2008. Since the implementation of the law, teen crashes resulting in injury or death have dropped by 61 percent. Most states have a GDL law system but they vary greatly in the



driving restrictions and safety practices that teens must abide by. In order for states to be eligible for MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act) Federal Highway Safety Funds through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, states must have minimum qualifications in their GDL.

- *A state's GDL provisions must include a two-stage licensing process with restrictions that apply through age 17.*
- *As required by MAP-21, the first stage of licensing, typically called the learner's permit stage, must be a least six months in duration and it may not expire until the driver is at least 16 years old.*
- *Teens in the learner's stage must be accompanied by and supervised by a licensed driver 21 years and older.*
- *The intermediate stage can begin no earlier than age 16 and must be in effect for at least six months but may not expire until age 18 years.*
- *A state's GDL provisions must prohibit the use of cellular telephones and any other electronic communications devices and be enforced as a primary offense.*
- *MAP-21 prohibits a teen in the intermediate stage from operating a motor vehicle with more than one non-family member younger than age 21 as a passenger.*

In comparing Nebraska's GDL provisions to the minimum federal requirements, Nebraska has a two-stage licensing system starting with a learners permit then advancing to a provisional operators permit (POP). Like the federal requirement, Nebraska requires that a teen driver be at least 16 years old before moving from a learner's permit to a provisional operators permit. Nebraska GDL provisions place passenger restrictions during the POP stage. These restrictions are in place for the first six months of having the POP permit unlike the federal requirement where passenger restrictions are in effect until full licensure. Nebraska bans the use of any interactive wireless communication device while operating a motor vehicle. This prohibition is enforced as a secondary offense, unlike the primary enforcement requirement in MAP-21. MAP-21 requires that the intermediate stage be in effect until at least age 18 whereas in Nebraska a 17-year-old may obtain an unrestricted driver license but they must have held a POP for at least one year. Only seven states across the country meet these requirements and qualify for this federal funding.



Parent Programs

There are many effective tools that parents can use to help them help their teen become a skilled and safe driver. One effective tool mentioned earlier, is the Checkpoints program developed by the National Institutes of Health. This program uses an online parent-teen driving agreement that facilitates discussion about setting driving limits and rules. This program also educates parents on what the appropriate limits are and why. To learn more about the Checkpoints program and to use the parent-teen driving agreement, go to www.youngdriverparenting.org.

Many states have mandates that require parents to attend an educational session with their teen before they begin driver's education class. In some cases, parents are required by the instructor to attend



this session without a state mandate. In these sessions, parents are educated about a teen's risk

of being involved in a crash, informed about the state's GDL and provided information about how to teach their teen to drive. In Nebraska, a teen can take either a driver's education course or submit proof of 50 hours of driving to the Department of Motor Vehicles to secure a provisional operators permit. The Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles provides the booklet, *The Parents' Supervised Driving Program* (www.dmv.ne.gov), to all teens getting their learner's permit. This booklet, gives parents guidance on how to teach their teen to drive and includes a driving log.

Parents can gain access to many teen driver resources on the web. These parent websites include but are not limited to State Farm *Road Trips*, The National Safety Council's *Drive it Home*, AAA *Keys2Drive*, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia *Teen Driver Source*, Allstate Foundation *Teen Driving/Under Your Influence*,

CDC Parents Are the Key, NHTSA *Parents Central From Car Seats to Car Keys*.

Teen Programs

Peer-to-peer education programs are showing promise in reducing teen driver crashes across the country. One such program is *Teens in the Driver Seat* (TDS). This school-based program is the nation's first widespread, grassroots, peer-to-peer program focused exclusively on teen driver safety. The TDS program is designed to address both awareness and behavior by turning peer pressure in a positive and productive direction. TDS addresses the five top risks for teen drivers: nighttime driving, speeding, distractions, low seat belt use and alcohol. Since the inception of this program in Texas in 2002, they have experienced an average crash reduction of 14.6 percent in those counties where TDS was implemented. This program



was developed by the Texas A&M Texas Transportation Institute. Nebraska is implementing this program in select high schools across the state for the first time starting in the 2013-2014 school year. For more information about the program, go to t-driver.com.

AAA's TeenDriving.AAA.com website has a full range of tools to help parents and teens throughout the whole new driver process. The site's tools include quizzes, parent-teen driving agreements and Nebraska licensing process. In Nebraska, AAA works with law enforcement agencies and safety advocates across the state. The Friday Night Lights "Buckle-Up" program is conducted by the Nebraska State Patrol with support, including T-shirts and wrist-bands from the Cornhusker Motor Club Foundation, a non-profit organization funded largely by AAA and members. AAA's Foundation also supports the AT&T IT CAN WAIT education program to bring attention to the dangers associated with texting and driving. AAA provides free DNT TXT & DRV pledge banners, wrist bands, tattoos and thumbnail decals to schools hosting distracted driving education events. As a primary provider of driver education material, AAA helps to ensure that high schools have the latest DVDs and other training material by donating new film releases to the Nebraska Office of Highway Safety where

they are available to Nebraska high schools on a free-loan basis.

Celebrate My Drive® was created by State Farm® in 2012 to share the belief that safe driving is a lifelong commitment. Celebrate My Drive® is a community celebration of safe driving habits, not scare tactics, emphasizing the positives of safe choices behind the wheel as teens celebrate the freedom that comes with getting a drivers' license. During National Teen Driver Safety Week, in October, communities across the country are encouraged to make safe driving commitments on behalf of their high school. The more commitments made, the better the chances of winning grants for



the school. Communities rally both online and at State Farm agent hosted events. The 100 high schools with the most votes from their students and community will win grants of \$100,000 (10 schools) or \$25,000 (90 schools). Ten percent of grant awards must be invested in teen driver safety.

There are many organizations across Nebraska that conduct and support teen driver safety activities. These organizations include, but are not limited to, the Nebraska State Patrol, Nebraska Safety Council, National Safety Council-Nebraska, Nebraska Office of Highway Safety, Nebraska Health and Human Services-Division of Public Health, Project Extra Mile, Nebraska Safety Center, Nebraska Safe Kids, local/district health departments, schools and the Drive Smart Nebraska Coalition.

In Summary

Teen driver safety requires a multi-faceted approach to make a difference. It takes parents, teens, community partnerships, law enforcement, schools and policy makers using evidence-base policies, education and programs. The impact of these combined efforts will be the prevention of teen crashes and related deaths and injuries.



Sources

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