



### JAMA Patient Page: Teenaged Drivers

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death of teenagers in the United States. Over 5,000 teenagers die each year in such crashes, and teen drivers are involved in a substantial number of crashes that result in deaths of other people.

Graduated driver licensing is a step-by-step licensing process that can help reduce the number of teen motor vehicle crashes and save lives. The October 3, 2001, issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association* includes two articles about teen drivers and graduated licensing.

#### Reasons for Teen Crashes

- Lack of experience can make it difficult for teens to recognize and respond to hazards on the road
- Risk-taking behavior and immaturity result in speeding, going too fast for road conditions, inattention, using alcohol or other drugs, and not using seat belts (nearly one in five high school students report they rarely or never use them)
- Greater risk exposure such as teens driving at night with other teens in the vehicle

#### Graduated Licensing

Not all states have graduated licensing, but you can still adopt your own graduated driving rules for your teenager. A suggested program may be:

##### Stage One

- Teen must be 15 1/2 years old to have a learner's permit, must complete a driver education program, and must drive only with an adult over 21
- Teen driver may not drive between 10 PM and 5 AM; must wear a safety belt; and use no tobacco, alcohol or other drugs while driving
- Teen driver must remain ticket-free and crash-free for six months

##### Stage Two

- Teen must be at least 16 and have had a learner's permit for six months
- Driver must drive with an adult during nighttime hours and drive unsupervised only during daytime hours
- Passengers should be restricted to only one non-family member
- Driver and passengers must wear safety belts at all times and should not use tobacco, alcohol or other drugs in the vehicle

- Driver must remain ticket-free and crash-free for 12 months before moving on to a full driver's license

### **Stage Three**

- Teen must be at least 18 or have driven for two years at Stage Two
- No restrictions on driving if teen has been ticket-free and crash-free for six months
- No use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs permitted, and all passengers must wear safety belts

### **Ways Parents Can Help**

1. Don't rely on driver education classes alone to teach your teen to be a safe driver — take an active role and plan practice sessions that include night and bad weather driving; work up to challenges such as highway and heavy traffic driving
2. Restrict night driving as it requires more skill — set and enforce curfews of 9 p.m. or 10 p.m.
3. Remember you are a role model and must practice safe driving to set an example
4. Prohibit drinking and other drug use and driving; offer a free call and ride home in case your teenager has been abusing drugs or alcohol or is with a driver who is doing so
5. Choose vehicles for safety and avoid cars with high-performance images, such as sports cars; be sure the car the teen drives is properly maintained

**Sources:** American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, American Automobile Association, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, National Safety Council

### **For More Information**

National Insurance Institute for Highway Safety  
(703) 247-1500  
[www.hwysafety.org](http://www.hwysafety.org)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
(202) 366-9550  
[www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov)

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control  
(770) 488-4652  
[www.cdc.gov/ncipc](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc)

### **Inform Yourself**

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A JAMA Patient Page on driving and alcohol was published on May 3, 2000.

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