

## Teen Driver Safety Talking Points/General Information

- Congress established National Teen Driver Safety Week in 2007. National Teen Driver Safety Week is held the third week of October to raise awareness about teens' elevated crash risks and to start a dialogue on the issue of driver safety and in-car responsibility among teens, their parents, and civic leaders.
- Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 16-24 year olds.
- Driving is a very complex activity. Drivers must put together multifaceted evaluations, make split second decisions and perform intricate maneuvers. Lack of experience and risk taking behavior can create a potentially lethal mix for young drivers. Many teens do not yet understand the complexity of driving. Age and maturity, combined with behind-the-wheel driving experience, improve driving ability.
- According to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, **only 1 in 10 teens know that passengers increase a teen driver's crash risk.** In a survey of high school students, only 10 percent of teens knew that carrying teen or adolescent passengers increased crash risk. (Ginsburg et al. *Pediatrics*. 2008) The American Medical Association found that teen drivers with one passenger in the vehicle were 39 percent more likely to get into a crash and when there are three or more passengers in the vehicle with the teen driver, the risk of a crash increases by 182 percent.
- According to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), **most teen driver crashes are due to driver error caused by inexperience and distraction.** Novice teen drivers lack the experience needed on the road to recognize and react to high-risk conditions and situations. Distractions such as passengers compound the inexperience factor and increase teen crash risk.
- Some key contributors to crashes involving teen drivers in Pennsylvania include driver inexperience, driver distractions, driving too fast for conditions and improper or careless turning.
- From 2015 to 2019, there were 85,706 crashes involving at least one 16 to 19-year old driver in Pennsylvania, resulting in 516 fatalities. 69.1 percent of those crashes involved the teen driver driving too fast for conditions (29,354 crashes), driver inexperience (9,223), driver distraction (14,104) or improper/careless turning (13,436). There was a total of 59,271 crashes with one or more of these teen driver factors.
- According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the highest risk of a crash occurring is in the first six months and 1,000 miles of driving.
- Parents who set, monitor and enforce safe driving practices have teens who are less likely to crash and violate the law. Involved parents, who set high expectations as well as nurture their young drivers, will see their children more likely to drive safely at far greater rates than teens with permissive or uninvolved parents (CHOP, 2009).

- We cannot stress enough the importance of adult supervision of our teen drivers – it is a critical component of keeping our teen drivers safe. We charge parents/guardians with the responsibility of leading by example and taking an active role in setting limits (parent/teen driving contracts are a good way to set those limits) as they will be able to best gauge the teen driver’s knowledge, skills and maturity behind the wheel.
- We encourage parents/guardians to begin an open dialogue with their teens about driving prior to their teen drivers turning 16.
- While this may be a focus when the teen driver has a learner’s permit, this responsibility continues even after the teen driver becomes licensed.
- All of us can play a part in teen driver safety by setting good examples for our teens; it’s a partnership among all of us.
- Over the years, PennDOT has looked for ways to enhance the driver’s license issuance process for teens while maintaining a balance between safety and mobility.
- Pennsylvania Graduated Driver Licensing Program, which took effect in 1999, was a major enhancement to teen driver safety and has proven effective in reducing crashes and fatalities for 16 and 17-year-old drivers. However, we realized additional enhancements could be made, such as passenger restrictions. In December 2011, a law (Act 81) helped boost the effectiveness of the GDL Program by increasing behind-the-wheel training requirements, placing a limit on the number of passengers a young driver can transport and making not wearing a seatbelt a primary offense for young drivers and passengers under 18.
- In August 2012, a law (Act 84) became effective, requiring any person age 16 or 17 who wants a motorcycle license to first complete the Basic Rider Course (BRC) offered by the Pennsylvania Motorcycle Safety Program.
- We continue to look for ways to make enhancements to the GDL Program to keep our most at-risk drivers, their passengers and those of us who share the road with these drivers safe by evaluating countermeasures, crashes and fatalities, the causes of crashes and the environment.

## **Texting and Driving**

- Pennsylvania’s anti-texting law (Act 98), which became effective March 8, 2012, prohibits as a primary offense any driver from using an Interactive Wireless Communications Device (IWCD) to send, read or write a text-based communication while his or her vehicle is in motion.
  - The law defines an IWCD as a wireless phone, personal digital assistant, smart phone, portable or mobile computer or similar devices that can be used for texting, instant messaging, emailing or browsing the Internet.

- The law defines a text-based communication as a text message, instant message, email or other written communication composed or received on an IWCD.
- The penalty is a summary offense with a \$50 fine, plus court costs and other fees.

**Pennsylvania Graduated Driver Licensing Requirements/Restrictions**  
**(Note: These pertain to 16-17 year-olds)**

- A requirement for certification of 65 hours behind-the-wheel skill-building, to include 10 hours of nighttime driving and 5 hours of driving in inclement weather. Before 1999, there was no requirement for skill-building hours behind the wheel. (NOTE: The 10 hours of nighttime driving and 5 hours of driving in inclement weather are both provisions of Act 81)
- A requirement for a mandatory period of six-months for skill-building. Before 1999, the requirement was 30 days.
- A requirement that the supervising adult in the car with the young driver must be at least 21. Before 1999, the requirement was 18.(NOTE: This pertains to the adult who will be certifying the teen driver who has a learner’s permit has completed his/her 65 hours of required behind-the-wheel skill building)
- A requirement that the nighttime driving curfew begin at 11 p.m. (Note: The nighttime driving curfew ends at 5 a.m.) Before 1999, the curfew began at midnight.
- A requirement for stricter sanctioning for junior drivers – a mandatory suspension of 90 days for a young driver who accumulates six or more points or has a high-speed conviction of 26 miles an hour or more above the posted speed limit. Before 1999, we utilized discretionary sanctioning through the PA Point System.
- Drivers younger than 18 may not transport more than one passenger who is under 18 and is not an immediate family member unless they are accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. After six months, the junior driver may transport up to three passengers younger than 18 who are not immediate family members without a parent or legal guardian present, but only if that driver has not been convicted of a driving violation or has not been partially or fully responsible for a reportable crash. (NOTE: From 1999 to 2011, the passenger restrictions for 16-17 year-old drivers were no more passengers in their car than available seat belts.) Before 1999, there was no requirement.
- Junior drivers and passengers under age 18 must wear a seatbelt, and children under the age of eight must be fastened in a child restraint system (A new provision of Act 81).

**Parent’s Supervised Driving Program:**

- Parental involvement in teen driver learning has a measurable, positive impact on driving safety. A 2012 study published by CHOP and State Farm, Driving Through the

Eyes of Teens, noted that when parents are actively engaged in the supervised driving process teens are 50% less likely to crash; 71% less likely to drive intoxicated; 30% less likely to drive distracted; and twice as likely to wear seatbelts.

- The Parent's Supervised Driving Program offers a solution to the problem of under-resourced and unprepared parents of teen drivers who are confronted with the 65 hour GDL supervised driving requirement.
- Readily available to every family of all teen learner's permit holders at no cost, The Parent's Supervised Driving Program aims to make sure that the parents are actively provided information to help parents understand their responsibilities and ultimately, to ensure that teens are well prepared before they start driving independently.
- The Parent's Supervised Driving Program includes step-by-step driving instructions for parents on how to help their teen through the supervised driving process, including practicing in a variety of conditions and focusing on "higher order" driving skills.

### **Safety Tips for Teens**

- Always wear your seat belt.
- Don't drink and drive. Drinking under the age of 21 is illegal.
- Obey the speed limit; driving too fast gives you less time to react.
- Do not talk or text on your cell phone while driving. Texting is illegal.
- Use your turn signals so other drivers know what you are doing.
- Focus on the driving task – the road and the conditions around you.
- Don't eat or drink while driving. These are also distractions.
- Adjust radio and climate controls before beginning your trip, have your passenger adjust the controls for you or adjust the controls when you are stopped.
- Plan ahead; know where you are going and get directions.
- Leave early and give yourself plenty of time to get there.
- Expect the unexpected.

### **Safety Tips for Parents**

- **Teaching Your Teenager to Drive**
  - Talk about driving with your teen (begin having conversations with your teen prior to him or her turning 16).
  - Set an example.
  - Know the rules of the road.
  - Make sure your vehicle is safe and well-maintained.
  - Be familiar with the tasks and requirements of teaching your teen to drive. Use the publication The Parent's Supervised Driving Program, available on PennDOT's website [www.dmv.pa.gov](http://www.dmv.pa.gov) at the Teen Drivers tab under Driver Services.
  - Start out slow and simple, in a low traffic area or a parking lot.
  - Work your way into more difficult driving.
  - Allow your teen to drive in all situations and all kinds of weather.
  - There is no such thing as too much practice.

- **After Your Teenager Receives His or Her Driver's License**
  - Limit the number of passengers.
  - Limit dawn, dusk and nighttime driving until your teen gathers more experience.
  - Enforce a curfew.
  - Gradually increase the amount of time and distance you allow your teen to drive.
  - Continue to reinforce good driving behaviors with your teen by discouraging eating, drink or using a cell phone while driving. Texting is illegal.
  - Enforce observance of speed limits and other rules of the road.
  - Continue to discuss the dangers of drinking and driving with your teen. Drinking under the age of 21 is illegal.
  - Ride with your teen occasionally to monitor his or her driving skills.