

eHouseCall

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A Monthly Electronic Newsletter from HealthLink

Doctor's Bag



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WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO?

When it comes to inexperienced drivers, don't be afraid to "lay down the law." Literally.

The statistics relating to injury, permanent disability and death from teenage auto accidents are staggering. Unfortunately, we doctors can do little in the way of prevention; we treat the casualties only after accidents have occurred.

It is up to parents, older siblings, and other adult mentors to both educate and monitor inexperienced drivers.

Start by setting a good example. Wear your seatbelt. Drive defensively. Stay off the cell phone. Don't smoke, drink or eat while behind the wheel. No alcohol consumption in the car, ever.

Talk to young drivers about safety issues. Make sure they know how to change a flat tire and recognize basic automotive problems.

Encourage an open dialogue about peer pressure and driver/passenger responsibilities.

Make sure new drivers understand the legal consequences of risky driving behavior.

And don't be afraid to set limits. These can include curfews, number of passengers, even distance traveled.

One of the most exciting events in a teen's life is earning a driver's license. Your guidance can help keep a new driver – and everyone else on the road – safe and healthy.

HLInfo YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

JUNE

SAFE DRIVING TIPS FOR TEENS

School is out and kids from 16 on up are driving to summer jobs, summer school, summer camps and summertime events. Anyway you look at it, more inexperienced drivers add up to increased risk for everyone on the road.

Graduated Driver Licensing

Many states offer teens a supplementary Drivers' Ed program known as Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL). GDL encourages parents and other adult sponsors to partner with students to help them learn the basics of safe driving. The Journal of the American Medical Association advocates voluntary parental enforcement of such a program and suggests the following guidelines:



Stage One

- *Teen must be 15 and a half years old to have a learner's permit, must complete a driver education program and must drive only with an adult over age 21.*
- *Teen driver may not drive between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m., 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.*

DidUKnow?

According to information published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC)*:

- ♦ Teens are more likely than older drivers to underestimate or not recognize hazardous situations. (Jonah*)
- ♦ Teens are more likely than older drivers to speed and allow shorter headways (distance from the front of one vehicle to the front of the next). The presence of male teenage passengers increases the likelihood of these risky driving behaviors among teen male drivers. (Simons-Morton*)
- ♦ Among male drivers between 15 and 20 years of age who were involved in fatal crashes in 2005, 38% were speeding at the time of the crash and 24% had been drinking. (NHTSA*)
- ♦ Compared with other age groups, teens have the lowest rate of seat belt use. (CDC*)
- ♦ In 2005, half of teen deaths from motor vehicle crashes occurred between 3 p.m. and midnight, and 54% occurred on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. (IIHS*)
- ♦ Crash risk is particularly high during the first year that teenagers are eligible to drive. (IIHS*)

*DidUKnow Information Sources

Jonah BA, Dawson NE. Youth and risk: age differences in risky driving, risk perception, and risk utility. *Alcohol, Drugs and Driving* 1987; 3:13-29

Simons-Morton B, Lerner N, Singer J. The observed effects of teenage passengers on the risky behavior of teenage drivers. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 2005; 37:973-82.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Dept. of Transportation, 2005 (www.nhtsa.dot.gov)

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 2005 (www.cdc.gov)

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) Fatality facts: teenagers 2005 (www.iihs.org)

Main Story Information Source

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