

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT: PARENTS ARE THE KEY TO TEEN DRIVING SUCCESS

Talk to Teens About the Importance of Driving Safety During National Teen Driver Safety Week

Springfield, IL. National Teen Driver Safety Week is October 17-23, 2021 – the perfect opportunity to talk with teens about safe driving habits. This year, the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is teaming up with **Prevention First** to help empower parents to discuss the importance of driving safety with their young drivers. Parents of teen drivers can partner to support each other through this period of life. Don't hand over the keys until the teen knows the [Rules for the Road](#). Ultimately, parents are in control.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for teens (15-18 years old) in the United States. There were 2,042 people killed in crashes involving a teen passenger vehicle driver (15-18 years old) in 2019; 628 of the deaths were the teen driver. In 2019, an estimated 92,000 teen passenger vehicle drivers were injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes and an estimated 264,000 people were injured in crashes involving a teen driver, accounting for almost 10% of all those injured that year.

"Parents play a critical role in teen driver safety in their ability to consistently communicate important driving safety information," said **Kathy Murphy**. "New teen drivers are still gaining experience behind the wheel, which increases the chance of dangerous situations for the teen and others around them," **Kathy** said. "This is why it's so important for parents to have these discussions with their teens. Don't be afraid to have this conversation every day. NHTSA [offers parents and caregivers helpful tips](#) and a framework for having discussions with their teen drivers about risky driving behaviors that can lead to fatal consequences."

By sharing their driving experience, parents can help teen drivers make smart choices and actions to stay safe on the road. NHTSA gives parents [tips](#) on how to talk about safe driving behaviors with their teens along with how to address the most dangerous and deadly driving behaviors for teen drivers: alcohol and other drug use, lack of seat belt use, distracted driving, speeding, and driving with passengers.

NHTSA's website, www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving, has detailed information and statistics on teen driving, and outlines the basic rules parents can use to help reduce the risks for teen drivers:

- 1. Impaired Driving:** All teens are too young to legally buy, possess, or consume alcohol. However, nationally, 16% of teen passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2019 had alcohol in their system. Alcohol isn't the only substance that can keep teens from driving safely: marijuana affects a driver's ability to react to their surroundings. Driving is a complex task and marijuana slows the reaction time. Remind teens that driving under the influence of any impairing substance – including illicit or prescription drugs, or over-the-counter medication – can have deadly consequences. Let teens know this behavior won't be tolerated.
- 2. Seat Belt Safety:** Wearing a seat belt is one of the simplest ways for teens to stay safe in a vehicle. Yet, too many teens aren't buckling up. More than half (55%) of the teen passenger vehicle drivers who died in crashes in 2019 were unbuckled. Teen drivers and passengers are more likely to die in a crash if they are unbuckled (nine out of 10 of the passengers who died were also unbuckled). Empower teens to stand strong and confirm everyone is buckled up - including front seat and back seat passengers - before the vehicle moves. Reward teens with driving privileges for buckling up every trip, every time, and requiring their passengers to do the same.

- 3. Distracted Driving:** Cell phone use while driving is more than just risky — it can be deadly. Texting while driving is outlawed in 47 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Remind teens about the dangers of using a phone while driving and clarify that any phone use (texting, talking, or using any social media apps) is unacceptable. Even if they are stopped at a light, remind teens that posting on social media while driving is unacceptable and illegal.

Distracted driving isn't limited to cell phone use. Other passengers, audio and climate controls in the vehicle, eating, or drinking while driving are all examples of dangerous distractions for teen drivers. In 2019, among teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes, 10% were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. Remind teens that headphones are not appropriate to wear while driving a vehicle. All drivers need to be able to hear another vehicle's horn or the siren from an emergency vehicle, so they can safely move over and out of the path.

- 4. Speed Limits:** Speeding is a critical issue for all drivers, especially for teens who are less experienced. In 2019, more than one-quarter (27%) of all teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes were speeding at the time of the crash. Males were more likely to be involved in fatal speeding-related crashes than females. Remind teens to always drive within the speed limit.
- 5. Passengers:** Passengers in a teen's vehicle can lead to disastrous consequences. Research shows the risk of a fatal crash dramatically increases in direct relation to the number of passengers in a vehicle. The likelihood of teen drivers engaging in risky behavior triples when traveling with multiple passengers.

Parents can help protect their teen drivers by discussing risky driving behaviors. Self-reported surveys show that teens whose parents set firm rules for driving typically engaged in less risky driving behaviors and were involved in fewer crashes.

Teens need to understand the rules and any other restrictions outlined in **Illinois'** graduated driver licensing [Graduated Driver License \(ilsos.gov\)](https://ilsos.gov) and the deadly consequences that could occur. By knowing and enforcing the laws, the teen driver's safety, and that of others on the road is improved.

“Teens will learn much of this content in driver education, but it's their home environment that drives the lessons home and gets the rules to stick. Parents should set these rules before handing over the car keys,” **Kathy** said. “We hope parents will start the conversation about safe driving during National Teen Driver Safety Week then keep the conversations going — every day throughout the year — to help keep their teens safer behind the wheel.”

For more information about National Teen Driver Safety, visit www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving.