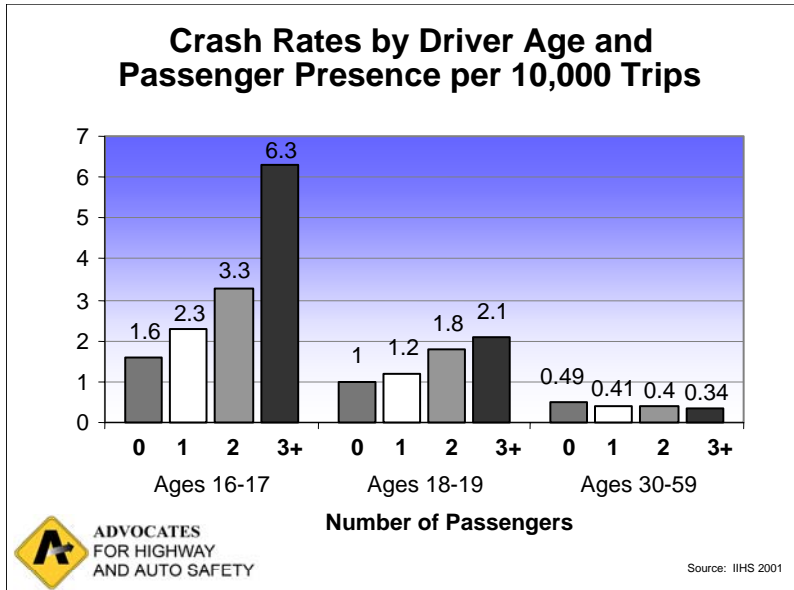


# Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) and Teen Drivers: Passenger Restrictions

Teen drivers are far more likely than other drivers to be involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes because they lack driving experience and tend to take greater risks due to their immaturity. GDL provides a structure in which beginning drivers gain substantial driving experience in less-risky situations and has proven to be effective in reducing young driver crash fatalities. One component within GDL is to restrict the number of non-familial passengers during the first months of licensure.

## THE STATISTICS



Currently only 44 states have a three stage Graduated Driver Licensing program. Of those states, only 29 states have an optimal passenger restriction provision (no more than one non-familial teenage passenger).

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), over half of 16- and 17-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes were carrying passengers younger than 21. **Mayhew D. "Reducing the Crash Risk for Young Drivers". June 2006**

Between 1995 and 2004, 16- and 17-year-old drivers were involved in 24,704 fatal crashes, resulting in the deaths of 10,445 of these drivers, 8,925 of their passengers, and 9,430 other people. **Mayhew D. "Reducing the Crash Risk for Young Drivers". June 2006**

For teenage drivers, the presence of one passenger almost doubles the fatal crash risk compared with driving alone. With two or more passengers, the fatal crash risk is five times as high as driving alone. On the other hand, for older drivers, passengers either have no effect on crash risk or a beneficial effect. **Doherty, et al., The Situational Risks of Young Drivers: The Influence of Passengers, Time of Day, and Day of Week on Accident Rates. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 30:45-52.**

The increased risk with passengers present is thought to be largely the result of distractions and risk-taking factors. In police reports of fatal crashes in which two or more teenagers were in the vehicle, there is in some cases evidence of distraction (e.g., turning around to talk to someone in the rear seat), physical interference (e.g., passenger grabbing the steering wheel), or inducements to risk taking (e.g., trying to get the driver to overtake another vehicle). **Williams, Preusser, Ferguson. 1998. Fatal crashes involving 16 year-old drivers: narrative descriptions. *Journal of Traffic Medicine* 26:11-17.**

California was the first state to enact a meaningful passenger restriction, not allowing passengers younger than 20 to be transported without an adult present for the first six months of licensure. Results showed that in 1999 teenage passenger deaths and injuries when traveling with 16-year-old drivers declined by 23 percent compared with the five prior years. **Automobile Club of Southern California, 2000**

A comparison between Oregon, a state with a strong intermediate GDL stage that includes nighttime and passenger restrictions, and Ontario, Canada, a province with a less restrictive intermediate stage, shows that per-driver crash rates among 16-year-old drivers are nearly 50% less in Oregon. **Mayhew D. "Reducing the Crash Risk for Young Drivers". June 2006**



## COMMON MYTHS

Even though 44 states have a three stage GDL program, not one state has the four components advocated for by groups like the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the National Transportation Safety Board. These components include: Six month holding period provision for a learner's permit, at least 30 hours of supervised behind-the-wheel training with an adult licensed driver during the learner's permit stage, a nighttime restriction that limits unsupervised driving from the hours of 9 or 10pm to 5am during the intermediate stage of GDL, and a passenger restriction that limits the number of teenage passengers that may accompany a teen driver without adult supervision to one non-familial teenager. Despite the proven success of GDL programs, many still have concerns about the restrictions they impose. Below are some common myths regarding passenger restrictions.

Myth #1: Passenger restrictions place an undue impact on teenager's social activities.

Counterpoint #1: In a survey conducted of California teenage drivers regarding passenger restrictions, most (89 percent) said they could find ways to do their activities anyway, and 74 percent said the restriction did not affect them very much. The majority of parents said there was no inconvenience caused by the restriction. Only eight percent of parents said there was inconvenience that was frequent or major.

Myth #2: Enforcement of passenger restrictions is overly burdensome on law enforcement agencies.

Counterpoint #2: Passage of this legislation is not meant to be solely a directive for law enforcement to beef up efforts towards teen drivers. Successful implementations of GDL programs have always included parental involvement and broad education efforts (media, nonprofit groups, driving instructors, printed materials, etc.) For example, North Carolina made a recent adjustment to their GDL program (cell phone restriction), which yielded more than 200 news stories (print, radio, television), which in turn, reached the homes of millions of North Carolinians. The more parents and their teenagers know about their state's GDL laws, the more inclined they are to adhere to them.

Myth #3: Our state already has a GDL program that works just fine.

Counterpoint #3: Unfortunately, not one state in the nation has every component of an optimal GDL program. While many states over the years have implemented some form of GDL, the available and ongoing research validates the need for both nighttime and passenger restrictions, for which very few states have. A June 2006 study by Johns Hopkins University found that those states with comprehensive GDL programs that included nighttime and passenger restrictions showed up to a 20% decrease in fatalities amongst 16-year-old drivers.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Baker, S., *National Evaluation of Graduated Driver Licensing Programs*, Johns Hopkins University, June 2006  
<http://tinyurl.com/gad6x>

Mayhew, D., *Reducing the Crash Risk for Young Drivers*, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, June 2006  
[www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/ReducingTeenCrashes.pdf](http://www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/ReducingTeenCrashes.pdf)

National Safety Council, *Graduated Driver Licensing Symposium: The Collection of Papers*, 2003  
[www.nsc.org/gdlsym/index.htm](http://www.nsc.org/gdlsym/index.htm)

