



Jackson County Department of Public Health

Anna Lippard
Deputy Health Director
828-587-8225

2022-41
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 30, 2022

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

National Teen Driver Safety Week is October 16-22, 2022 — 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 Safe Kids Jackson County to empower parents to discuss safe driving habits with their young drivers. Assure your teen driver knows the [Rules of the Road](#) before you hand over the keys. 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 2,276 people killed in crashes involving a teen passenger vehicle driver (15-18 years old) in 2020; 748 of the deaths were the teen driver. In 2020, an estimated 90,564 teen passenger vehicle drivers were injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes and an estimated 153,566 people were injured in crashes involving a teen driver, accounting for almost 7% of all roadway injuries that year.

"Parents play a critical role in teen driver safety and in communicating important driving safety information," said Martha Thomasson, Safe Kids Jackson County Coordinator. "New teen drivers are still gaining experience behind the wheel, which increases the chance of dangerous situations for the teen and other roadway users around them," she said. "This is why it's so important for parents to have these discussions with their teens. Start the conversation today and continue it every day. NHTSA [offers parents and caregivers helpful tips](#) and a framework for having discussions with teen drivers about risky driving behaviors that can lead to fatal consequences."

It's a parent's responsibility to help teen drivers make smart choices to stay safe on the road. NHTSA gives parents and guardians [tips](#) on how to talk about safer driving. These tips include discussions on how to influence positive behaviors and how to approach dangerous and deadly driving behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use, lack of seat belt use, distracted driving, speeding, or driving with passengers.

NHTSA's website, www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving, has detailed information and statistics on teen driving, and outlines tips parents can use to address teen driver safety risks:

1. **Impaired Driving:** All teens are too young to legally buy, possess, or consume alcohol. Nationally, 19% of teen passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2020 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



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the influence of any impairing substance — including illicit or prescription drugs, or over-the-counter medication — can have deadly consequences. Let teens know that positive driving behaviors are rewarded with the continued privilege to drive.

- 2. Seat Belt Safety:** Wearing a seat belt is one way teens can stay safer in a vehicle. Unfortunately, too many teens aren't buckling up. Over half (52%) of the teen passenger vehicle drivers who died in crashes in 2020 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, and eating or drinking while driving are all examples of dangerous distractions for any driver. According to the most recent data available, in 2020, among teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes, 7% 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 2020, almost one-third (31%) 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 that a teen driver will engage in risky behavior triples when multiple passengers are in the same vehicle.

Parents can help 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.



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Teens need to understand the rules, whether there are any other restrictions outlined in North Carolina’s graduated driver licensing ([GDL law](#)), and the deadly consequences that could occur. By knowing and enforcing the laws, the teen driver’s safety and that of other road users can be improved.

“Teens will learn much of this content in driver education, but it’s through parent conversations and their home environment that the lessons are driven home and the rules enforced. Parents should set these rules before handing over the car keys,” Thomasson said. “They need to be proactive and start the conversation about safe driving during National Teen Driver Safety Week, then keep the conversations going every day. Teaching teens safe behaviors behind the wheel is a shared responsibility, and we all have a part to play.”

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

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