



# Better Safe!



WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

## Safe Driving For Distracted Teens Steering In The Right Direction

Learning to drive is a milestone in a young person's life. Driving can bring freedom, especially in areas with little public transportation. But it also has its downside. Mile for mile, teenagers are involved in three times as many fatal crashes as more experienced drivers. Crashes are the leading cause of death for 16- to 20-year-olds nationwide. What makes young drivers more vulnerable to accidents and injuries than older drivers? And what can we do to reduce their risk?

### The Risks With Teen Driving

The highest risk for teens comes during the first six months that they have their licenses. Risk remains high until at least their early 20s. Studies show that teens can face a double challenge when getting behind the wheel. They're not only young, and so lack maturity; they're also inexperienced—a main cause of crashes.

Additional risks include:

**Decision-making and impulse control**—continue to develop well into their 20s as they gain experience and their brains mature fully.

**Dialing or texting**—doing so while driving is never safe. But when teens dial or text while driving, they are five to six times more likely to crash than adults.

**Ability to recognize and respond to road hazards**—Adolescents are also less able to recognize and respond to road hazards. For instance, research shows that experienced adult drivers typically prepare to brake on the chance that a pedestrian might enter a crosswalk. Teens may look, but they often fail to recognize a hazard and slow down.

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"It can be a situation with a perfectly reasonable, normal kid who makes a mistake when in a vehicle, and that can be lethal," says Dr. Bruce Simons-Morton, a National Institutes Health expert in adolescent behavior and prevention research. "It only takes one instance of inattention at just the wrong time."

Learning to drive safely takes years of practice, Simons-Morton adds. "The dilemma is that teens only learn by driving, but the more they drive the greater their risk."

### Teen Passengers: One Of The Biggest Risks For Driving Teen

When it comes to a teenager behind the wheel, crash risks are nearly double with one passenger and increase even more with each additional passenger. This is true for all teens, even those who are responsible and trustworthy.

Most states do not allow teens to have more than one passenger under the age of 21 (unless the passenger is a member of the driver's immediate family or the driver is traveling to or from school or a school-sanctioned event between 5 am and 10 pm).

To stay on the safe side, it's a good idea to initially limit your teen to no teen passengers, and gradually increase passenger privileges as your teen gains more driving experience.

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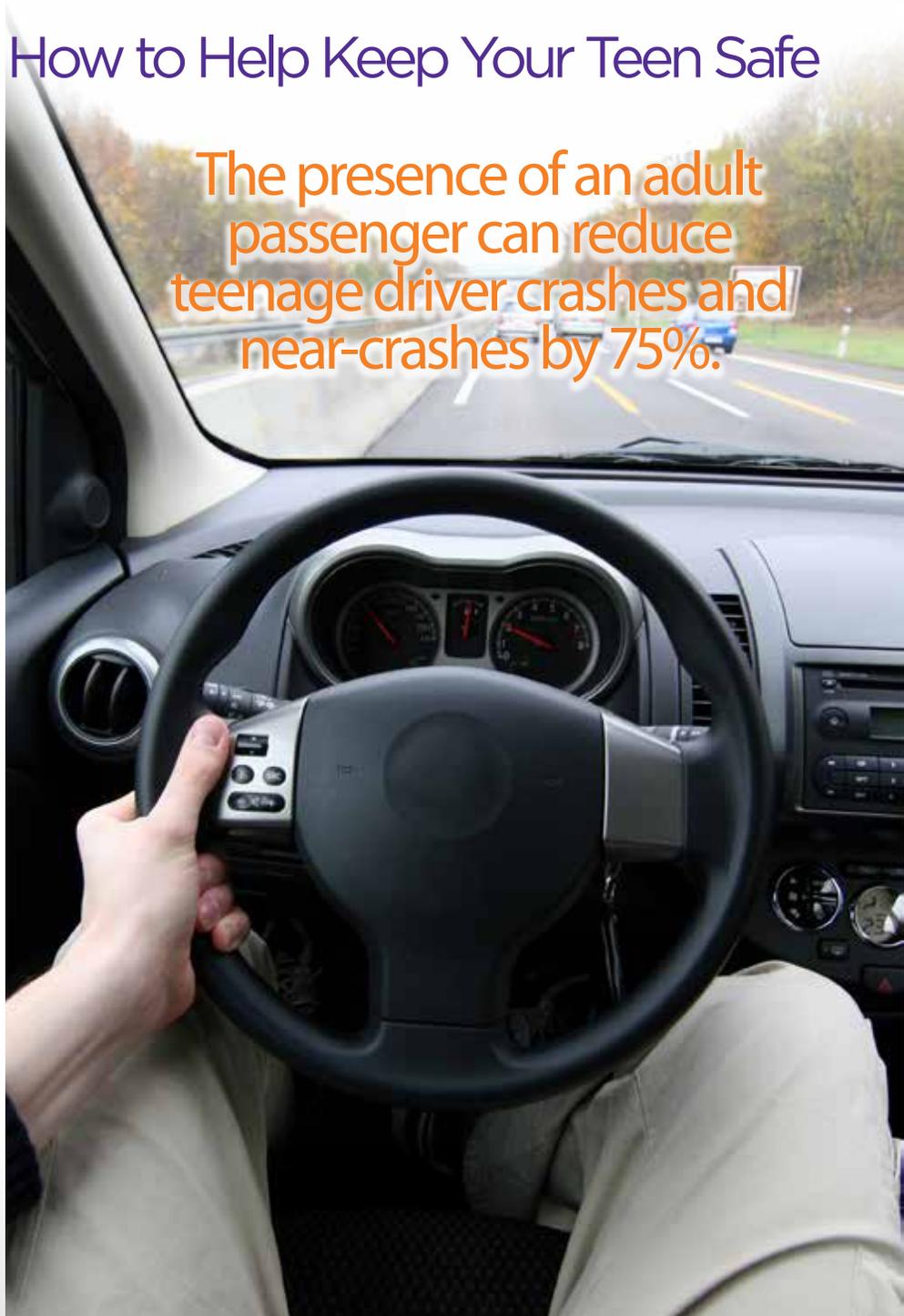
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## Teen Driving: How to Help Keep Your Teen Safe

One solution is to limit the conditions under which teens are allowed to drive. All 50 states have laws that grant privileges to new drivers in phases—known as graduated licensing programs. Most require new drivers to hold a learner's permit for six months before getting a license and have a minimum number of supervised practice driving hours.

Research has shown that these graduated programs can dramatically reduce the rate of fatal crashes. "We encourage parents to set limits that are stricter than the graduated driver licensing programs," says Simons-Morton. It's also important for parents to ride with teens as much as possible when they practice. The presence of an adult passenger can reduce teenage driver crashes and near-crashes by 75%.

Help your teen be a responsible driver. By setting reasonable limits, you can help young drivers travel the roadways safely.



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### SAFE DRIVING FOR TEENS

- Limit driving under risky conditions, such as at night and in bad weather.
- Limit teen passengers, especially ones that engage in risky behaviors.
- Don't tolerate texting or dialing while driving, driving after drug or alcohol use, or riding with a driver who has used drugs or alcohol.
- Make sure new drivers and their passengers always wear seat belts.

