



Insurance Institute for
Highway Safety



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Nighttime Restrictions for Young Drivers

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The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is a nonprofit research and communications organization that identifies ways to reduce deaths, injuries, and property damage on our nation's highways. We are supported by auto insurers. Thank you for the opportunity to submit for the record research findings about the crash risks for young drivers when they drive at night.

Night driving restrictions

Driving at night is a high-risk activity for people of all ages, especially the very youngest drivers. This is why night driving restrictions are included in graduated licensing laws in every state except Vermont. We know these restrictions work based on studies in several states that have curtailed young people's night driving since at least the 1960s. For example, New York's restriction (9 pm to 5 am) was established before 1970, and Pennsylvania's (midnight to 5 am) took effect sometime before 1977.¹ Likewise, Maryland implemented its nighttime driving restriction in 1979.

Night driving restrictions reduce crashes to the extent they cut down on driving, and the reductions are dramatic. A 1984 study found crash reductions of 62 percent during restricted hours in New York and 69 percent in Pennsylvania.² Although the percentage reduction was smaller in New York than in Pennsylvania, the total number of crashes averted was much greater in New York because the state's restriction covered 9 pm to midnight, a time when many crashes involving young drivers occur. The same study found no evidence of spillover effects to unrestricted hours. Nor were there offsetting increases in injuries to 16-year-old passengers, pedalcyclists, or pedestrians during restricted hours.² Research shows that nighttime restrictions enacted in jurisdictions with graduated licensing laws are working:

Florida	17 percent reduction in fatal/injury crashes among 16 year-olds ³
Michigan	59 percent reduction in crashes among 16 year-olds ⁴
North Carolina	43 percent reduction in crashes among 16 year-olds ⁵
Nova Scotia	45-60 percent reduction in crashes among 16-17 year-olds ⁶
California	9 percent reduction in the proportion of fatal/injury crashes among 16-17-year-old drivers occurring during restricted hours ⁷

A national study conducted in 2010 concluded that a nighttime driving restriction beginning at 10 pm reduces fatal crashes among young drivers by 16 percent compared with no restriction, and by 5 percent compared with a restriction beginning at midnight.^{8,9} A similar study in 2013 concluded that a nighttime driving restriction beginning at 10 pm reduces fatal crashes among young drivers by 10 percent compared with no restriction.¹⁰

It is important to recognize that these restrictions do not ban all driving at night. Driving under adult supervision is allowed, and all states allow unsupervised nighttime driving that is considered essential. Maryland allows, among other things, young drivers to use their vehicles for employment-related driving and for school-related activities. The idea is to restrict high-risk recreational driving without hindering young people's engagement in purposeful activities.

Many states, including Maryland, allow nighttime driving by young drivers until midnight. However, 93 percent of night trips taken by drivers ages 16-17 occur between 9 pm and midnight.¹¹ Thus a large portion of the high-risk time period is not covered by driving curfews of midnight or later.

In Maryland during 2005-14, 3,496 police-reported crashes involving drivers ages 16-17 occurred between 10 pm and midnight. Thus an average of 350 crashes each year occurred during this time period (Table 1). These crashes could be reduced by starting the nighttime driving restriction at 10 pm rather than midnight. Thirteen other states already have nighttime driving restrictions beginning at 10 pm or earlier (Table 2).

Table 1
Police-reported crashes in Maryland among drivers ages 16-17, 2005-14

Time	Age 16	Age 17	Total
12:00–5:59 am	668	1,958	2,626
10:00–11:59 pm	1,009	2,487	3,496
9:00 –9:59 pm	717	1,583	2,300
Other times	11,520	27,337	38,857

Table 2
States with nighttime driving restrictions starting at 10 pm or earlier

Start time	State
10 pm	Delaware, Indiana, Nevada, Michigan, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia
9 pm	Kansas, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota
8 pm	—
7 pm	—
6 pm	South Carolina (EST)
Sunset	Idaho

Night driving restrictions can involve some inconvenience for parents. Still, surveys of parents show strong support for graduated licensing laws in states where it has been adopted and for night driving restrictions where they are in effect. In one national survey of parents, 69 percent approved of night driving restrictions beginning at 10 pm or earlier.¹²

Summary and conclusions

Maryland has been a pioneer in implementing laws to reduce crashes and injuries among young drivers. It currently limits nighttime driving to reduce the frequency of young driver crashes. Research by the University of Maryland School of Medicine shows that Maryland's graduated driver licensing law has reduced crashes and nonfatal injuries among 16-year-old drivers.¹³ Changing the start time of the nighttime restriction from midnight to 10 pm will strengthen Maryland's law.

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