

**Statement before the Maryland House
Committee on Environmental Matters**

Passenger 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 the deaths, injuries, and property damage on our nation's highways. We are supported by the nation's automobile insurers. The Institute is submitting research results on trends in crashes and deaths involving young drivers and passengers. We also are focusing on the crash risks when young drivers transport other teenage passengers.

Scope of the problem

The young driver problem is well recognized and acknowledged. Less recognized is that the age group most affected by licensing policies — 16 year-olds — has by far the highest crash risk of drivers of any age. Nationally, the crash risk per mile driven by 16 year-olds is twice that for 18-19 year-olds and about 7 times the risk for drivers ages 30-59 (Figure 1). The risk pattern is similar for *fatal* crashes involving young drivers (Figure 2).

Figure 1
Driver crash involvement per million miles traveled by driver age, 2001-02

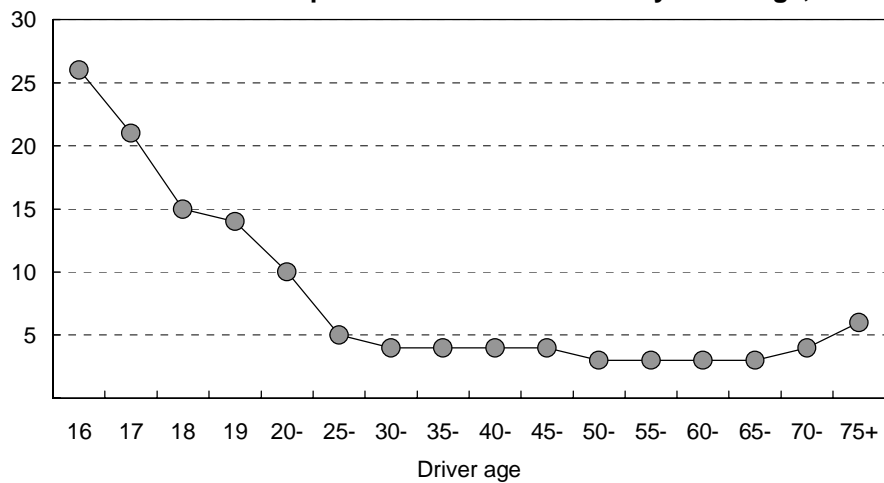
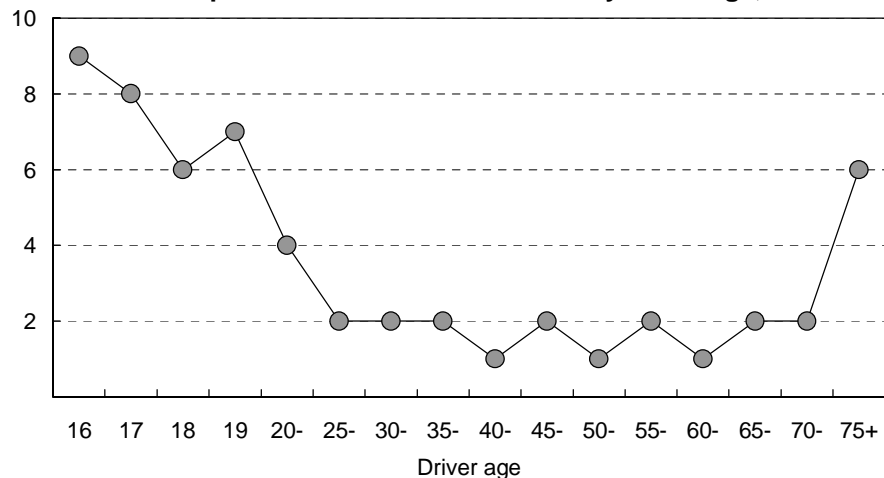


Figure 2
Fatal crashes per 100 million miles traveled by driver age, 2001-02



The problem is that 16 year-olds, as a group, are inexperienced. They are the youngest and most immature licensed drivers. Compared with the fatal crashes of older drivers, those involving teenage drivers, especially 16 year-olds, more often are single-vehicle, run-off-the-road collisions; more often involve speeding; and more often include multiple passengers (Table 1).

Table 1
Fatal crash characteristics by driver age, 2003

	16	17-19	20-49
Driver error	77%	73%	57%
Speeding	38%	36%	23%
Single vehicle	50%	45%	39%
3+ occupants	28%	24%	18%
0.08+ BAC	13%	27%	42%

Most teenagers who are fatally injured are drivers, but many teens also die as passengers. In Maryland 43 percent of the motor vehicle deaths of 16-19 year-olds during 1993-2003 were passengers. Among 16-year-olds the split was close to 50-50 (49 percent drivers, 51 percent passengers) (Table 2).

Table 2
Number of fatally injured drivers and passengers in Maryland, 1993-2003

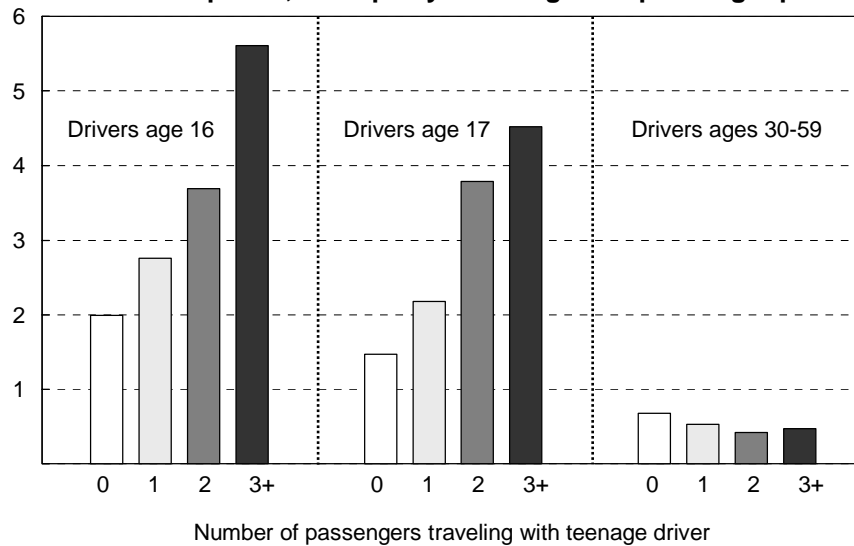
Age	Drivers	Passengers
16	57	60
17	89	72
18	95	70
19	106	58
Total	347	260

Driving with passengers

A major risk factor for teenage drivers is the presence of passengers, especially teenage passengers. For older drivers, passenger presence either has no effect on crash risk or decreases it; but for young drivers, passengers greatly magnify the risk. That is, teenagers' already high fatal crash risk when driving alone increases dramatically when passengers are added (Figure 3).¹

The reasons are obvious. Teenage passengers create distractions for drivers who are inexperienced to start with and who need to be paying full attention to the driving task. Plus the presence of peers in the vehicle often induces young drivers to take risks.

Figure 3
Fatal crash rates per 10,000 trips by driver age and passenger presence



Passenger restrictions can involve some inconvenience for parents. Still an Insurance Institute for Highway Safety survey of parents and teens shows strong support for graduated licensing in states where it has been adopted and for passenger restrictions where they are in effect.²⁻³

For example, California's graduated licensing law went into effect in 1998 and was the first to include a meaningful passenger restriction. No passengers younger than 20 are allowed in the vehicle during the first 6 months of licensure unless an adult 25 or older is present. When the Institute surveyed parents, there was strong support for graduated licensing and for the passenger restriction (Tables 3 and 4).³

Table 3
California parents' opinions
about graduated licensing

Strongly favor	79%
Somewhat favor	18%
Neutral	1%
Opposed	3%

Table 4
California teenagers' and parents' views
about specific provisions of graduated licensing

	Teenagers approving	Parents approving
6-month permit	84%	95%
Nighttime restriction	65%	94%
Passenger restriction	39%	84%

We also found that, although graduated licensing limits some teenagers' social activities, four out of five teens were able to adapt and participate in these activities anyway (Table 5). And even though some parents reported occasional inconveniences from the passenger restriction, the majority of the parents surveyed reported no inconveniences (Table 6).

Table 5
California teenagers' adaptations to nighttime and passenger restrictions

	Nighttime	Passenger
Limited ability to		
Get together with friends	29%	59%
Go to parties	31%	44%
Go on dates	22%	45%
Able to participate in these activities anyway	81%	89%
Prevented from doing what they wanted		
Not at all	37%	17%
Not much	40%	56%

Table 6
California parents' views of inconvenience from nighttime and passenger restrictions

None	55%
Occasional	36%
Frequent	5%
Major	3%

More than half of U.S. jurisdictions (26 states plus the District of Columbia) have introduced passenger limitations as part of their graduated systems, and adopting such a requirement makes sense in Maryland.

References

1. Chen, L.; Baker, S.P.; Braver, E.R.; and Li, G. 2000. Carrying passengers as a risk factor for crashes fatal to 16- and 17-year-old drivers. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 283:1578-82.
2. Ferguson, S.A.; Williams, A.F.; Leaf, W.A.; Preusser, D.F.; and Farmer, C.M. 2001. Views of parents of teenagers about graduated licensing after experience with the laws. *Journal of Crash Prevention and Injury Control* 2:221-27.
3. Williams, A.F.; Nelson, L.A.; and Leaf, W.A. 2002. Responses of teenagers and their parents to California's graduated licensing system. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 34:835-42.