

STEERING TEENS CLEAR OF

DANGER

Join Newspapers In Education as we learn valuable safety rules for the road from State Farm®. This 10-week program is designed to help teenagers prepare to be safe drivers and passengers and to reduce the risk of accidents for everyone on the road. This program will run in The Seattle Times through May 22.

Week Seven: UNSAFE DRIVING PRACTICES

It's important to understand why teens crash at a higher rate than adults. There are many factors that come into play, but there are several common critical errors inexperienced teen drivers make that lead to serious crashes. These include lack of scanning to detect and respond to hazards, driving too fast for road conditions, and being distracted by something inside or outside of the vehicle. The main reason teens die in these crashes is failing to use their seat belts.

Teens and speeding

Teens see their driver license as proof that they're grown up. That piece of plastic with their photo symbolizes greater independence and freedom. What they don't realize: A license can also expose them to certain dangers, such as speeding.

Speeding, or going too fast for the road conditions, is a major factor in teen crash fatalities. Speeding increases stopping distance and reduces the time needed to avoid a collision (called the three-second rule). It also increases the likelihood that the crash will result in injury. For example, teens driving 40 mph in a 30 mph zone may think they're "only" going 10 mph over the posted speed limit. But that "small" increase in speed translates to a 78 percent increase in collision energy — that's nearly double.

Teens in focus groups across the country defined speeding as "more than 10 miles per hour above posted limits." Half said they drive that much faster (or more) over the posted speed limit at least sometimes. Think about what effect going 10 mph over the posted speed limit in a residential neighborhood or busy city street could have. Now consider its effect while driving on a dark, curvy road on a rainy night.

For parents — what you can do:

- Talk to your teen about the dangers of speeding.
- Stress the importance of staying in control of the car.
- Lead by example. Always follow the posted speed limit, whether or not you're in a rush.
- Be sure to include "always following the posted speed limit" when you and your teen agree on driving rules. Remind your teen that if this rule is not followed, driving privileges will be taken away.
- As part of supervised driving practice, be sure to cover speed management for various conditions with your teen.

By communicating with your teen and being a positive role model, you can make following the speed limit the rule, not the exception.

Teens and seat belts

Even though most teens do wear a seat belt, teens buckle up the least of any age group. While seat-belt use is important for all ages, it's crucial for this age group because their crash rate is so high. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), two-thirds of teens killed in crashes were not wearing seat belts.

Teens may ask the question: If my car has air bags, why do I have to wear a seat belt? Air bags are designed to work with a seat belt, not alone. The number one way to reduce your chance of dying or getting injured in a crash is to buckle up. Make it a habit. Don't even put the key in the ignition until the seat belt is fastened. Seat belts reduce the possibility of death by 45 percent for front-seat-passengers. These are odds you want working in your favor. Let seat belts do their job.

For parents:

You can help. Research shows teens who view their parents as involved (set rules and monitor) are twice as likely to wear a seat belt as a driver or passenger as teens who say their parents are uninvolved. These teens are also nearly twice as likely to believe that buckling up affects safety. You can make a difference by always wearing a seat belt and insisting that everyone else does, too. Teens decide what's "normal" or "expected" by observing the behaviors around them. They'll be more likely to buckle up if you have established it as routine.

Other ways to promote seat-belt safety:

- Establish seat-belt use as a rule for using the car. Your teen driver and all passengers must buckle up every time, or car privileges will be suspended. Be sure to remind your teen of this rule whenever he or she takes the keys and heads out the door.
- Explain that it's about safety, not control. Insisting on seat belts is a rule in place for your teen's safety, not for control. It's a rule you follow yourself and one you demand because of how much you care.
- Tell them the straight facts. A lot of teens think seat belts are only necessary on highways or on long trips. Let them know that most crashes happen in the neighborhood and that people can get seriously hurt at local driving speeds.
- It's not just about them. Explain that most adolescent passengers that died in wrecks were not wearing seat belts. In a crash, an unrestrained body can also hurt others in the car.

Seat-belt use

General statistics

- Two-thirds of teens killed in crashes were not wearing seat belts.¹
- Teens have the lowest seat-belt use of any age group.²
- Teens more frequently associate seat belt use with a "safe driver" rather than a "good driver."³
- Teen drivers consistently buckle up, 13 percent more than when they're passengers.⁴
- Male teens continue to lag behind female teens in seat-belt use. In 2009, 11.5 percent say they rarely or never wear a seat belt as a passenger, compared to 7.7 percent of high school females.⁵
- Driving programs that combine education, peer-to-peer strategies, publicized enforcement, and parental monitoring may show potential for increasing teen seat-belt use.⁶

Sources:

1. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). *Traffic Safety Facts 2001*. DOT HS 809 484. Table 68, page 103. Available at: www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/airbags/buassteens03/BUA_SBTeens.pdf. Accessed April 7, 2010.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Teen Drivers: Fact Sheet*. 2009. Available at: www.cdc.gov by searching "teen driver fact sheet." Accessed April 7, 2010.
3. Barg FK, et al. *Teen Perceptions of Good Drivers and Safe Drivers: Implications for Reaching Adolescents*. *Injury Prevention*. Feb. 10, 2009.
4. Winston FK, et al. Eds. *Driving: Through the Eyes of Teens*. Published by The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm Insurance Companies®. 2007.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Youth Online: Comprehensive Results 2009*. Accessed April 7, 2010.
6. Hanna C. *Children's Safety Network. Increasing Seat Belt Use Among Teens: A Summary of Research, Resources, and Programs*. April 2007.