



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Keeping Young Drivers Safe

Motor Vehicle Crash Deaths in Metropolitan Areas — United States, 2009

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Deaths attributed to motor-vehicle crashes continue to decline among all age groups in the United States. However, car crashes are still the leading cause of death among people 15 to 24 years old.

Laurie Beck is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. She's joining us today to discuss ways to help keep young people safe behind the wheel. Welcome to the show, Laurie.

[Ms. Beck] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Laurie, what has contributed to the recent decline in overall deaths attributed to motor vehicle crashes?

[Ms. Beck] Over the last several years, crash deaths have been declining and this is likely due to declines in miles travelled related to high gas prices and the poor economy. However, crashes do remain a leading cause of injury deaths in the US and they're the single leading cause of death for people aged 15 to 24 years old.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, why are young people more likely to be killed in motor-vehicle crashes?

[Ms. Beck] Risk factors for young people include inexperience behind the wheel, for teen drivers, driving with passengers and nighttime driving which are higher risk conditions. Young people have lower rates of seat belt use and higher rates of drinking and driving, and these contribute to crash deaths, as well.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are death rates higher in certain areas?

[Ms. Beck] We found in our study that crash-related death rates did vary widely in the 50 metropolitan areas that we studied. Death rates ranged from 4.4 to 17.8 per 100,000 residents, and death rates were generally higher in the southern areas of the United States. We didn't have the data to examine factors associated with this geographic variation, however, other research has found that areas with higher levels of urban sprawl have higher motor vehicle crash death rates than areas with more compact development. Urban sprawl, which is related to more miles driven, is more common in the southern US and this is consistent with the higher death rates we observed in the southern metro areas.

[Dr. Gaynes] Laurie, how can parents help their teens become safer drivers?

[Ms. Beck] Effective strategies to protect teens include strong graduated driver licensing policies. Parents can help to support this approach by working with their teens to create and sign a parent-teen driving agreement which establishes rules, such as limiting passengers in the vehicle, limiting hours of driving, restricting cell phone and texting behind the wheel, and these address the major hazards for new drivers. In addition, as teens gain experience, parents can grant more privileges through this driving agreement.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about driver safety?

[Ms. Beck] People can go to CDC's website at www.cdc.gov and in the search box, type 'motor vehicle safety.'

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Laurie. I've been talking today with CDC's Laurie Beck about safe driving tips for teens and young adults.

Remember, graduated drivers licensing and tougher enforcement of drunk driving laws can help prevent deaths. Parents, give your teens practice driving in varied conditions and, with your teens, create and sign a parent-teen driving agreement to encourage safe driving.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.