



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Teens Take the Wheel

National Teen Driver Safety Week — October 18-25, 2015

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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.

One of most noteworthy moments in a teenager's life is earning a driver's license. While it provides a newfound freedom, it also presents serious risks.

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

[Ms. Jewett] Thanks, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Amy, how many teen drivers are killed in motor-vehicle crashes in the U.S.?

[Ms. Jewett] In 2013, more than 2,000 teens, age 16 to 19, were killed in motor vehicle crashes. That's six teens *every* day. And for every teen who dies, there's about 125 teens that are treated in emergency departments for injuries suffered in motor vehicle crashes.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some of the reasons for fatal crashes among young drivers?

[Ms. Jewett] So, driving is a complex task and requires practice. Teens tend to underestimate dangerous situations or they don't recognize hazardous situations. They're more likely to speed and they have the lowest rate of seatbelt use.

[Dr. Gaynes] Are some teens more at risk than others?

[Ms. Jewett] Males are at especially high risk. The death rate for male drivers and passengers was almost two times that of females. And then teens driving with teen passengers. The presence of teen passengers increases the crash risk and the more teens that are in the car, the greater the risk. And then newly licensed teens. Crash risk is particularly high during the first months of licensure.

[Dr. Gaynes] Amy, what have state and local governments done to help address this problem?

[Ms. Jewett] So, some states have primary seatbelt laws. As I already mentioned, 56 percent of teens involved in fatal crashes were not wearing a seatbelt. We know that seatbelts reduce serious crash-related injuries and deaths by about half. Then there's zero tolerance laws for drinking under the age of 21 and teen drinking and driving. That means *no* alcohol for teens. The other main problem is driver inexperience. Graduated driver licensing programs have been enacted in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. These programs provide longer practice periods, they limit driving under high risk conditions for newly licensed drivers, and require greater participation of parents while their teens are learning to drive.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, what advice can you give parents of young drivers?

[Ms. Jewett] So, parents, *talk* to your teen about safety and responsibility, practice driving together, model good driving behavior by not speeding and using good defensive driving techniques, and last but not least, have a parent-teen driving agreement that puts *your* rules in writing to *clearly* set expectations and limits for your teen.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about teen driving?

[Ms. Jewett] They can go to parentsarethekey—all one word—dot gov. This website has a driving agreement that parents can download.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Amy. I've been talking today with CDC's Amy Jewett about the importance of teaching teens good driving habits.

Remember, nothing can replace the influence of parents on new drivers. Parents—model safe driving habits, make sure your teen always wears a seatbelt, and practice together as often as possible.

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.