



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Eyes on the Road

Distracted Driving – United States and Seven European Countries, 2011

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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 the first lessons new drivers learn is to keep their eyes on the road. Unfortunately, cell phones and other electronic devices are causing many drivers to lose their focus, and sometimes their lives.

Rebecca Naumann is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, and she's joining us today to discuss the dangers of distracted driving. Welcome to the show, Becky.

[Ms. Naumann] Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Becky, how many traffic crashes are caused by drivers using electronic devices?

[Ms. Naumann] Each day in the United States, more than nine people are killed in crashes that involve a distracted driver. We also know that nearly one in five crashes in which someone was injured involved distracted driving. When drivers take their attention away from the road and do things like make phone calls, e-mail, or text, they're putting themselves and others at increased risk and crashes are more likely to occur.

[Dr. Gaynes] How does the US compare with other countries?

[Ms. Naumann] Certain types of distracted driving appear more common among adult drivers in the United States compared to several European countries. For example, we found that nearly seven out of 10 drivers in the United States said that they talk on their cell phone while driving, compared to two out of ten drivers in the United Kingdom. We also found that 31 percent of drivers in the United States say that they read or send text or e-mail messages while driving, compared to 15 percent of drivers in Spain.

[Dr. Gaynes] Becky, are hands-free devices any safer to use while driving?

[Ms. Naumann] There's not a clear answer to that question, but here's what we do know. We know that hands-free phones may reduce some of the physical and visual distractions of dialing a phone and handling a phone, but there's still a different type of distraction that exists and that's a mental, or cognitive, distraction. And this is when drivers are taking their minds off of the task of driving. So really, any activity that takes your attention away from driving can increase your chances of being in a crash.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is distracted driving more common in any particular age group?

[Ms. Naumann] Distracted driving is really common among all age groups, but we do know that some of these behaviors are more common among young drivers. In fact, we see that, among drivers in the United States ages 18 to 34, about half of them report texting or e-mailing while driving. And it's really important that this not become a social norm. We know that distracted driving is dangerous.

[Dr. Gaynes] How can parents discourage their young drivers from using electronic devices while driving?

[Ms. Naumann] Parents have a crucial role to play in keeping their teens safe on the road. It's important for parents to consistently model safe driving behavior by putting their phone away every time they get in the vehicle. Parents can also use tools like parent-teen driving agreements to help set the ground rules for safe driving with their teens. These parent-teen driving agreements should include things like never talking on the phone while driving and never texting or sending e-mails while driving. They should also include important safe driving habits like never drinking and driving and wearing a seat belt on every trip.

[Dr. Gaynes] Becky, where can listeners get more information about distracted driving?

[Ms. Naumann] Listeners can go to cdc.gov and in the Search box, type 'distracted driving.'

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Becky. I've been talking today with CDC's Rebecca Naumann about the dangers of distracted driving.

Remember, crashes cause over one million deaths each year worldwide, and distracted driving is emerging as a serious threat to road safety. To help protect yourself and others, pull off the road and take that call or send that message in a parked vehicle.

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.