



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Waiting to Drive

Driving by High School Students – United States, 2013

Recorded: April 7, 2015; posted: April 9, 2015

[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.

Over the past 10 years, the number of fatal motor-vehicle crashes involving teenage drivers has declined more than 50 percent.

Dr. Ruth Shults is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. She's joining us today to discuss the driving patterns among teenagers. Welcome to the show, Ruth.

[Dr. Shults] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Ruth, what factors have contributed to this encouraging decrease in fatal motor-vehicle crashes among teenagers?

[Dr. Shults] Three things stand out. First, safer vehicles. Second, states have updated their licensing policies for teen drivers to help protect them from some of the more risky driving situations. For example, most states limit the hours that a newly licensed teen can drive at night and the number of teen passengers that a new teen driver can carry. And lastly, teens are driving less.

[Dr. Gaynes] Why are young people driving less?

[Dr. Shults] Well, we did see a drop in the proportion of young people who drive, around the time of the economic recession in the mid-2000s. The most common reasons for young people not getting licensed to drive involve economics, the cost of driving. But there're also many teens who just don't have much of a need to drive because they can get around without driving, and there are a certain number of teens who just aren't very interested in learning to drive. They see learning to drive as time consuming and they're busy with other things.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is teen driving more common in any region of the country or among any group of young people?

[Dr. Shults] Yes. Teens are more likely to drive in the Midwest region and the Mountain region where there are fewer people and likely fewer options for teens to get around. We also see differences by race and ethnicity. We see lower rates of driving among black teens and Hispanic teens than we do in white teens.

[Dr. Gaynes] Ruth, are there any driving restrictions on people *over* 18 who get their license for the first time?

[Dr. Shults] In most states, the licensing policies for teens apply only to newly licensed teens under the age of 18, so if a teen gets licensed after turning 18, these restrictions do not apply. There are some safety benefits to not driving at age 16 or 17, but there may also be some disadvantages for young people who don't get licensed until they turn 18. For example, teens who don't learn to drive before they leave home may have fewer options for practice driving with an adult supervisor.

[Dr. Gaynes] How can parents help keep young drivers safe?

[Dr. Shults] It's good for parents to keep in mind that teens can learn the basics of how to handle a vehicle in a matter of hours, but it takes years to become a really skilled driver. So parents should have their teen practice driving with an adult supervisor as much as possible and in all types of driving conditions. Resources are available online for parents to help make the most of this time that they spend practice driving with their teen. When teens start to drive independently, the safest car for them is the family car, instead of their own car, for two reasons. The family car is typically newer than a car that the family would purchase for the teen, and the teens drive more safely when they're sharing a car than when they have their own car.

[Dr. Gaynes] Ruth, where can listeners get more information about educating young drivers?

[Dr. Shults] They can go to parentsarethekey.gov and 'parentsarethekey' is all one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Ruth. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Ruth Shults about the impact of young people waiting longer to get their driver's license.

Every state has enacted graduated drivers licensing systems which place limits on driving privileges while teenagers learn the skills and responsibilities associated with operating a motor vehicle. However, most of these laws apply only to people under 18. Parents, your older teen novice drivers still need your guidance as they learn to drive.

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.