Statement before the Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee

Passenger restrictions for young drivers

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The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is a nonprofit research and communications organization that identifies ways to reduce the deaths, injuries, and property damage on our nation's highways. We are supported by the nation's automobile insurers. The Institute is submitting research results on highway crashes and deaths involving young drivers and passengers. We also present evidence on the crash risks when young drivers transport other teenage passengers.

Scope of the problem

The young driver problem is well recognized. Less recognized is that the age group most affected by licensing policies — 16 year-olds — has by far the highest crash risk among drivers of any age. Nationally the crash risk per mile driven by 16 year-olds is almost twice that for 18-19 year-olds and about 7 times the risk for drivers ages 30-59 (Figure 1). The risk pattern is similar for *fatal* crashes involving young drivers (Figure 2).

Figure 1
Driver crash involvement per million miles traveled by driver age, 2001-02

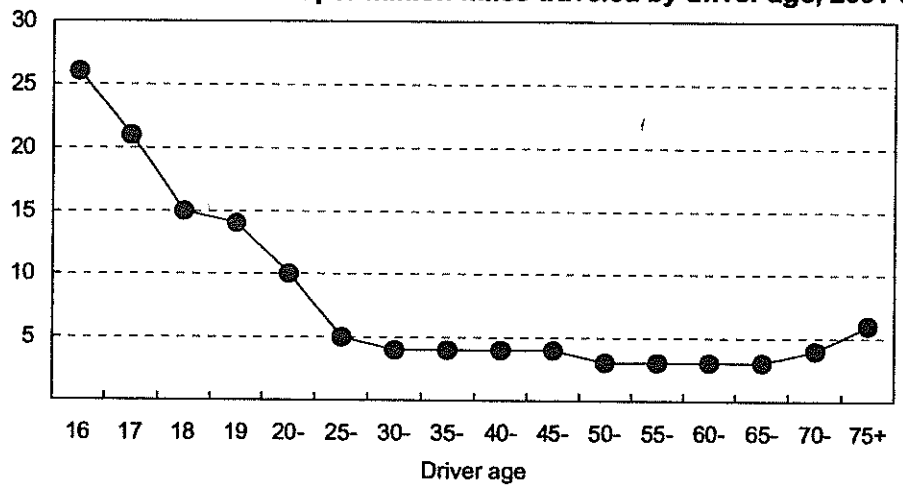
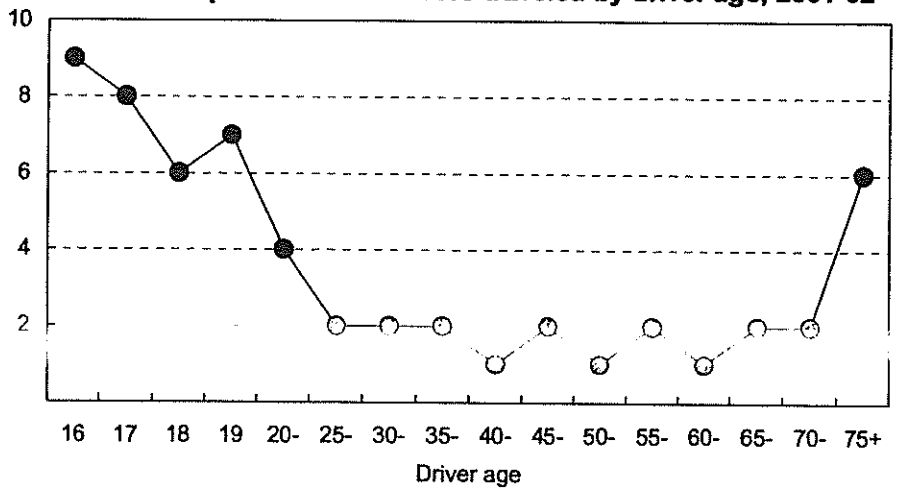


Figure 2
Fatal crashes per 100 million miles traveled by driver age, 2001-02



The problem is that 16 year-olds are inexperienced drivers. As a group they also are the youngest and most immature licensed drivers. Compared with fatal crashes among older drivers, those among teenage drivers, especially 16 year-olds, more often are single-vehicle, run-off-the-road collisions; more often involve speeding; and more often include multiple passengers (Table 1).

Table 1
Fatal crash characteristics by driver age (percent), 2005

	16	17-19	20-49
Driver error	74	70	55
Speeding	34	33	22
Single vehicle	49	45	40
3+ occupants	29	23	18
0.08+% BAC	5	10	19

Most teenagers who are fatally injured are drivers, but many teenagers also die as passengers. Nationwide in 2005, 38 percent of motor vehicle occupant deaths among 16-19 year-olds were sustained by passengers, and at age 16 the numbers of driver and passenger deaths essentially were equal. In Pennsylvania 41 percent of motor vehicle deaths among 16-19 year-olds during 1995-2005 were passengers. Among 16-year-olds more than half of occupants killed — 54 percent — were passengers (Table 2).

Table 2
Number of fatally injured drivers and passengers in Pennsylvania, 1995-2005

Age	Drivers	Passengers
16	157	185
17	253	192
18	314	183
19	334	171
Total	1,058	731

Nationwide in 2005, more than half of fatally injured teenage passengers ages 14-19 were in vehicles being driven by teenagers. The percentages were highest for 16 and 17 year-olds — 70 and 74 percent, respectively (Table 3).

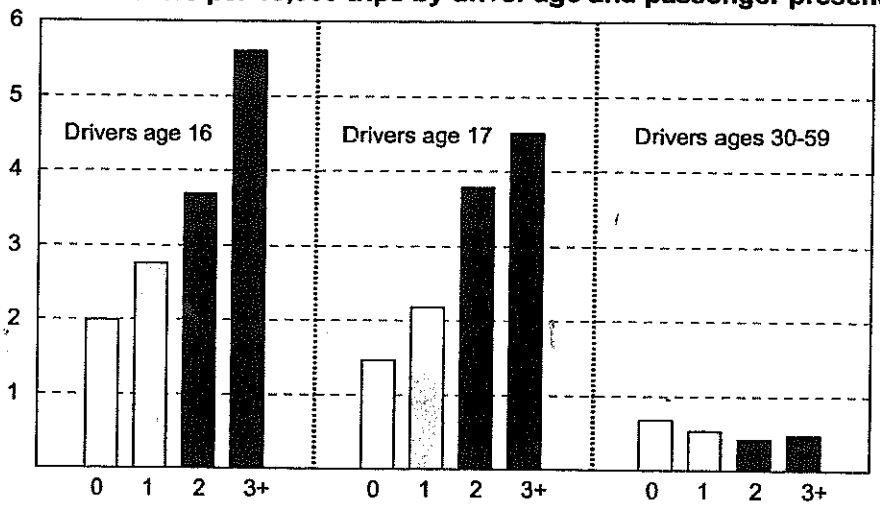
Table 3
Percent of fatally injured passengers in vehicles driven by teenage drivers, United States, 2005

Age	Percent	Age	Percent
0-10	8	15	66
11	7	16	70
12	20	17	74
13	29	18	60
14	53	19	47

Driving with passengers

A major risk factor for teenage drivers is the presence of passengers, especially teenage passengers. For older drivers, passenger presence either has no effect on crash risk or decreases it; but for young drivers, passengers greatly magnify the risk. That is, teenagers' already high fatal crash risk when driving alone increases dramatically when passengers are added (Figure 3).[1] In a 2000 Institute study, analyses based on passengers of all ages indicated that the driver death rates per million trips for 16 year-olds were 2.0 with no passengers, 2.8 with one passenger, 3.7 with two passengers, and 5.6 with three or more passengers. For 17 year-olds, driver death rates were 1.5 with no passengers, 2.2 with one passenger, 3.8 with two passengers, and 4.5 with three or more passengers.

Figure 3
Fatal crash rates per 10,000 trips by driver age and passenger presence



Characteristics of young drivers' fatal crashes reveal evidence of increased risk-taking behavior when teenage passengers are present. Speeding and driver error are more frequent in crashes with teenage passengers, and these characteristics increase with the number of teenagers in the vehicle (Table 4).

Table 4
Characteristics of 16-17-year-old drivers' fatal crashes when alone and with teenage passengers, United States, 2005 (percent)

	Driver alone	Driver and 1 teenage passenger	Driver and 2 teenage passengers	Driver and 3+ teenage passengers
Driver error	71	75	78	85
Speeding	30	34	42	46
Single vehicle	41	45	57	69
Any alcohol	12	15	12	16
0.08+% BAC	10	10	7	10

The reasons why passengers increase crash risk for teenage drivers are obvious. Teenage passengers create distractions for drivers who are inexperienced to start with and who need to be paying full attention to the driving task. Plus the presence of peers in the vehicle may induce young drivers to take risks.

Passenger restrictions can involve some inconveniences for parents. Still, an Institute survey of parents and teenagers shows strong support for graduated licensing in states where it has been adopted and for passenger restrictions where they are in effect.[2-3]

For example, California's graduated licensing law went into effect in 1998 and was the first to include a meaningful passenger restriction. No passengers younger than 20 were allowed in the vehicle during the first 6 months of licensure unless an adult 25 or older was present. When the Institute surveyed parents, there was strong support for graduated licensing and for the passenger restriction (Tables 5 and 6).[3] On January 1, 2006, the law was amended to extend the passenger restriction to the first year of licensure.

Table 5
California parents' opinions about graduated licensing (percent)

Strongly favor	79
Somewhat favor	18
Neutral	1
Opposed	3

Table 6
California teenagers' and parents' views about specific provisions of graduated licensing (percent)

	Teenagers approving	Parents approving
6-month permit	84	95
Nighttime restriction	65	94
Passenger restriction	39	84

The Institute also found that, although graduated licensing limits some teenagers' social activities, four out of five teenagers were able to adapt and participate in these activities anyway (Table 7). And even though some parents reported occasional inconveniences from the passenger restriction, the majority of the parents surveyed reported no inconveniences (Table 8).

Table 7
California teenagers' adaptations to nighttime and passenger restrictions (percent)

	Nighttime	Passenger
Limited ability to:		
Get together with friends	29	59
Go to parties	31	44
Go on dates	22	45
Able to participate in these activities anyway	81	89
Prevented from doing what they wanted:		
Not at all	37	17
Not much	40	56

Table 8
California parents' views of inconvenience from nighttime and passenger restrictions (percent)

None	55
Occasional	36
Frequent	5
Major	3

Thirty-nine states plus the District of Columbia have introduced passenger limitations as part of their graduated licensing systems. Four studies of the initial 6-month passenger restriction in California all indicated positive effects.[4-7] For example, an Institute study found a 38 percent reduction of 16-year-old drivers in crashes per capita in which teenage passengers were injured or killed.[7] In North Carolina, it has been reported that multiple-passenger crashes declined by 32 percent among 16-year-old drivers, and by 15 percent among 17-year-old drivers, since a passenger restriction was enacted.[8] National studies of the effects of graduated licensing also have reported crash reductions due to passenger restrictions.[9-10] Given the positive effects of passenger restrictions for young drivers, adopting such a requirement makes sense in Pennsylvania.

References

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