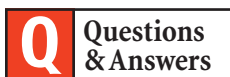
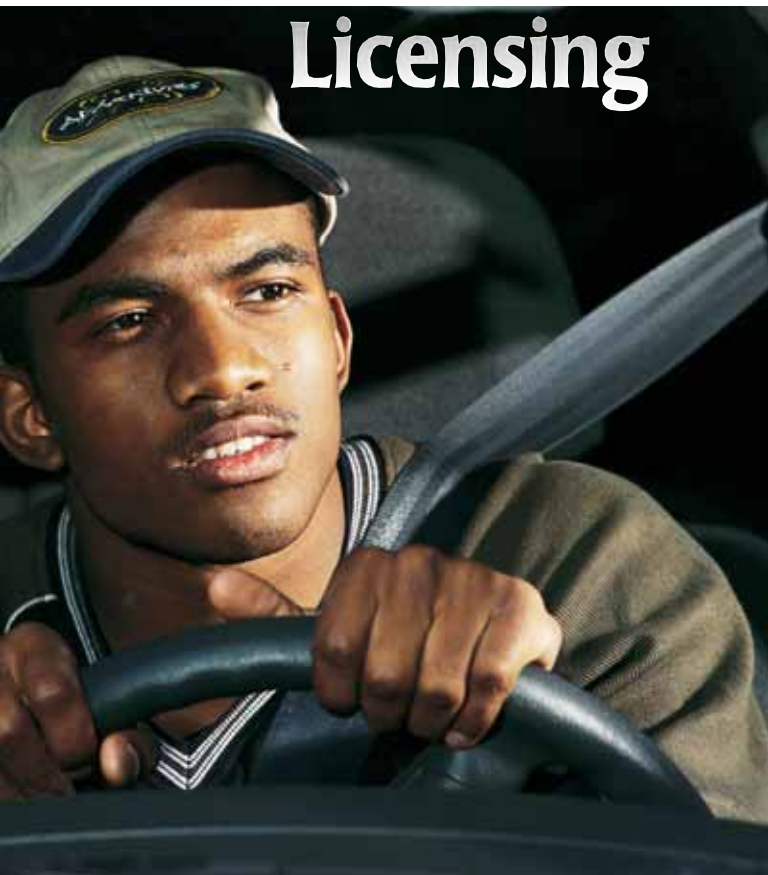


# Graduated Driver Licensing



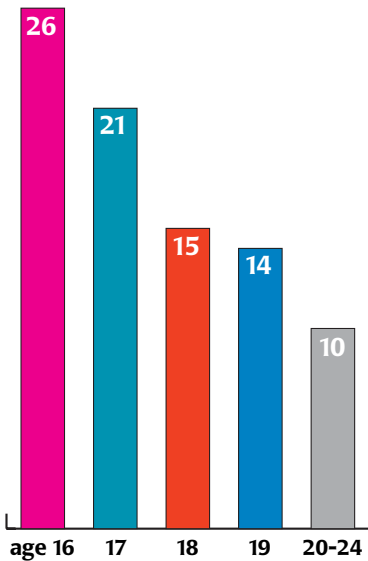
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## **Q** What is graduated driver licensing?

It's a system designed to phase in young beginners to full driving privileges as they become more mature and develop their driving skills. Versions of graduated licensing are in effect in New Zealand; Victoria, Australia; and several Canadian provinces. Beginning with Florida in 1996, graduated licensing systems also have been adopted in most U.S. states.

There are three stages to a graduated system: a supervised learner's period; an intermediate license (after passing the the driver test) that limits driving in high-risk situations except under supervision; and then a license with full privileges, available after completing the first two stages.

The best systems include a learner's stage, beginning at age 16 and lasting at least 6 months, plus restrictions on unsupervised night driving and passengers during the first 6 to 12 months of licensure. The nighttime driving restriction should start at 9 or 10 p.m., and no more than one passenger should be allowed with an unsupervised beginning driver anytime during the day.



**Crash involvements per million miles driven, by driver age**



No state law meets or exceeds all of these requirements, but most states do impose some of the core requirements. Some states add other requirements including belt use provisions, cell phone use restrictions, penalty systems so that violations result in license suspension or extension of the holding period, and driver education. For more about the licensing law in your state, or any state, go to [www.iihs.org/safety\\_facts/state\\_laws/grad\\_license.htm](http://www.iihs.org/safety_facts/state_laws/grad_license.htm).

## **Q** Why target young people? Why not target all novice drivers?

Graduated licensing could apply to all first-time drivers. This is the policy in many countries. But in the United States young people make up the majority of beginning drivers, and their crash rates are particularly high. Sixteen year-olds have higher crash rates than drivers of any other age, including older teenagers.

Two factors in particular work against young drivers: inexperience behind the wheel and immaturity. Young drivers need time to develop their driving skills and the



judgment to counteract their lack of on-the-road experience. Young drivers tend to overestimate their own physical and driving abilities and underestimate the dangers on the road.

The very youngest drivers are more likely to engage in risky behavior such as speeding, passing inappropriately, following other vehicles too closely, and driving without



**All teenagers are beginners when they first get behind the wheel. They all need time to develop their driving skills in low-risk settings.**

buckling their safety belts. Because of their inexperience, beginners are least able to cope with hazardous driving situations. The presence of passengers can increase the risk by distracting a beginning driver and creating peer pressure to participate in risky behavior. Teen passengers increase the crash risk for teenage drivers during the day as well as at night.

Graduated licensing doesn't attempt to modify driver behavior directly. Instead it introduces beginners to driving in a low-risk manner, protecting both them and others on the road while they learn to drive and become more mature. It should be noted that young people are subject to legal restrictions in a variety of areas that include voting, purchasing alcohol, serving in the military, and assuming financial obligations.

**Q Isn't it unfair to restrict all teenagers' driving privileges? Why not just penalize the problem drivers?**

We know some characteristics of younger drivers who are more likely to get into crashes, but it's impossible to identify them adequately and intervene before they crash. The licensing systems in many U.S. states impose greater and/or earlier penalties on young people for traffic violations than they do on older drivers, but most fatally injured young drivers don't have prior traffic violations or crashes on their records.

The logic of addressing all young people is that they all are beginning drivers. They all need time to develop driving skills in low-risk settings.

**Q Has graduated licensing reduced crashes?**

Yes. Sound research indicates that graduated licensing programs have had positive effects on the crash experience of young drivers in the United States and other countries, including Canada and New Zealand. In U.S. states that have adopted elements of graduated licensing, the safety benefits are evident. Almost all studies have found crash reductions from about 10 to 30 percent.





## **Q** What are nighttime driving restrictions?

These are different from curfews, which are viewed as means to get young people off the streets and into their homes at a set time. Communities often adopt curfews to reduce criminal or mischievous behavior, but the purpose of night restrictions on driving is to protect young beginners by keeping them from driving unsupervised during the high-risk nighttime hours.

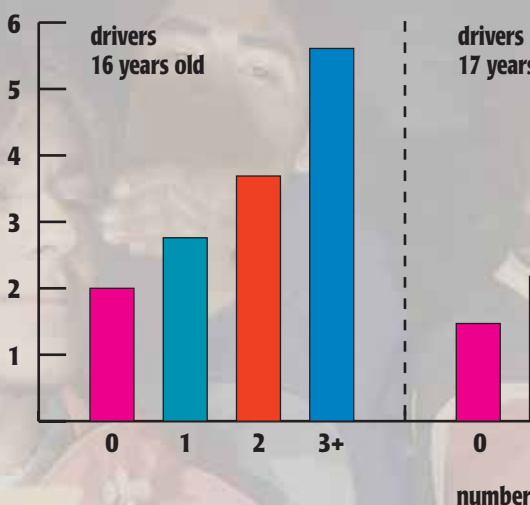
## **Q** Are nighttime restrictions critical components of graduated licensing?

Yes. Forty-two percent of the deaths of teenagers in motor vehicles during 2003 occurred between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Studies show that nighttime driving restrictions typically are associated with crash reductions of 40 to 60 percent during the restricted hours.

## **Q** When should the nighttime restrictions begin? How early?

Almost two-thirds of all fatal nighttime crashes involving 16 year-olds occur before midnight. This is when more young people are out on the roads. Therefore, nighttime driving restrictions for young beginners should start several hours before midnight.

## Risks when trans Driver death rates per 10,000 trips

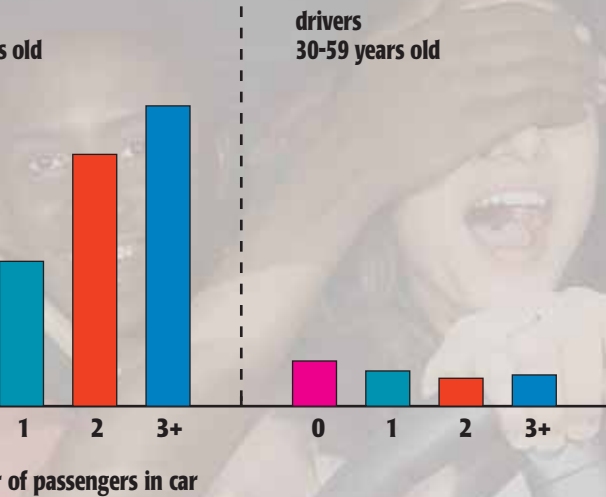


### **Q** Are passenger restrictions important?

They're essential components of graduated licensing. Crash risk for teenage drivers increases incrementally with one, two, or three or more passengers. With three or more, fatal crash risk is about three times higher than when a beginner is driving alone.

Passenger presence is a major contributor to the teenage death toll. In 2003 almost half of the crash deaths that involved 16-year-old drivers occurred when the beginners were driving with teen passengers. Studies indicate that passenger restrictions can reduce this problem.

## Transporting passengers: by driver age and passenger presence



### **Q** What guarantees that beginners will get more supervised driving under graduated licensing?

Requiring longer learner's permit periods (at least 6 months) provides more time for beginners to practice driving under the supervision of adults. Many states require parents to certify that their children have acquired a minimum amount of practice time, typically 50 hours. A survey conducted in Michigan indicates that parents are very positive about the 50-hour requirement. These parents reported an average of 75 hours of supervised driving.

## **Q Do parents support graduated licensing?**

Yes, parents strongly favor it. An Insurance Institute for Highway Safety survey of parents of young drivers in California who had gone through the graduated licensing process found 95 percent of the parents in support of a 6-month period of supervised driving. Ninety-four percent favored night driving restrictions, 84 percent favored restricting teenage passengers during the first 6 months, and 97 percent of the parents said they favor a licensing system that includes all of these components. The survey was conducted in 2000.

Parents of teens surveyed in 1996 in Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York said they strongly support graduated licensing. Although many parents want their children to get licenses early so they no longer have to be taken to school, work, or social activities, these same parents also worry about the risks.

## **Q Are the benefits worth the costs?**

States with graduated licensing report that the benefits far outweigh any costs. For example, in Oregon the administrative costs were estimated at \$150,000 while the benefits were estimated at nearly \$11 million. This amounts to a benefit-to-cost ratio of better than 74 to 1. Maryland and California also report lifesaving and injury-reducing benefits well in excess of administrative costs.

## **Q Are teenagers allowed to drive to school, work, and their extracurricular activities?**

Yes. States can and do allow waivers so a teenager may drive during restricted times to work or to attend school activities. These exemptions don't reduce the restrictions' effectiveness because the increased crash risk at night is largely due to the combination of more difficult driving conditions and distractions caused by teenage passengers. Young people driving to work are unlikely to have teen passengers. Graduated licensing does delay full licensure, but studies indicate it doesn't significantly hinder social activities. Sixteen year-olds have largely similar lifestyles in terms of social, dating, and work patterns, whether



## Teens may drive during restricted hours to work or school activities.

they live in states where many, some, or few 16 year-olds are licensed. Another concern is the administrative burden on states that have to issue many waivers. Maryland examined this when it implemented a nighttime driving restriction and found it wasn't a problem.

### **Q** Can driver education reduce the need for graduated licensing?

No. A 1994 report to Congress by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration cited general agreement among experts that current novice driver education programs aren't producing safer young drivers. A good education course, emphasizing on-the-road driving, can teach basic vehicle control skills, but extensive research indicates that high school driver education doesn't lead to lower crash involvement compared with other ways of learning to drive. Attitudes, decision-making skills, risk-taking tendencies, and other factors contribute to crashes and may not be affected much by driver education.



**Q** Questions  
& Answers

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