

TEENAGERS – DISTRACTED BEHIND THE WHEEL

Federal research indicates roughly 11% of all highway deaths are a result of distracted driving. But a new AAA study confirms what has long been feared, concluding that nearly 6 out of 10 moderate to severe crashes involving teen drivers are the result of driver distractions. This figure is significantly higher than that previously estimated, with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration concluding distraction played a role in only 14% or 1.4 in 10 teen crashes.

The most comprehensive research ever conducted into teen drivers has found 963,000 drivers ages 16-19 were involved in police-reported motor vehicle crashes in 2013, resulting in 383,000 injuries and 2,865 deaths.

Understanding the causes and contributing factors of teen driver crashes is necessary to develop effective solutions to reduce teen driver crash risk.

Researchers found that teen drivers manipulating their cell phones (includes calling, texting or other uses), had their eyes off the road for an average of 4.1 out of the final six seconds leading up to a crash. The researchers also measured reaction times in rear-end crashes and found that teen drivers using a cell phone failed to react more than half of the time before the impact, meaning they crashed without braking or steering.

Though authorities have often pointed to the use of cellphones – the study found there are a number of factors that can distract a teen driver. The most common distractions:

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| • Interacting with one or more passengers | 15% |
| • Cell phone use | 12% |
| • Looking at something inside the vehicle | 10% |
| • Looking at something outside the vehicle | 9% |
| • Singing or moving to music | 8% |
| • Grooming | 6% |
| • Reaching for an object in the vehicle | 6% |

Although most distractions are avoidable, some distractions are impossible to completely prevent – instead they must be managed. Driving requires one's full attention, as outlined below.

GUIDELINES FOR SAFE DRIVING:

1. Fully focus on driving. Do not let anything divert your attention. Actively scan the road, use mirrors and watch out for pedestrians and cyclists.
2. Store loose gear, possessions, and other distractions that could roll around in the car, so you do not feel tempted to reach for them on the floor.
3. Make adjustments before you get underway. Address vehicle systems like your GPS, seats, mirrors, climate controls, and sound systems before hitting the road. Decide on your route and check traffic conditions ahead of time.
4. Finish dressing and personal grooming at home – before you get on the road.
5. Snack Smart. If possible, eat meals or snacks before you drive, not while you are driving. On the road avoid messy foods that can be difficult to manage.
6. Secure children, siblings, and pets before getting underway. If they need your attention, pull off the road safely to care for them. Reaching into the back seat can cause you to lose control of the vehicle.
7. Put aside your electronic distractions. Don't use cell phones while driving – handheld or hands-free except in absolute emergencies. Never use text messaging, email functions, video games or the internet with a wireless device, including those built into the vehicles, while driving.
8. If you have passengers, enlist their help so you can focus safely on driving.
9. If another activity demands your attention, instead of trying to attempt it while driving, pull off the road and stop your vehicle in a safe place. To avoid temptation, power down or stow devices before heading out.
10. As a general rule, if you cannot devote your full attention to driving because of some other activity, it's a distraction. Take care of it before or after your trip, not while behind the wheel.

Parents play a critical role in preventing distracted driving. AAA recommends that parents teach teens about the dangers of cell phone use and restrict passengers during the learning-to-drive process. Before parents begin to practice driving with teens, they should create a parent-teen driving agreement that includes strict ground rules related to distractions. AAA offers a comprehensive driver education program, where teens can learn specifically how using a cell phone affects driving abilities and increases their crash risk.

REFERENCE & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- TeenDriving.AAA.com