



Distracted Driving **Among Newly** **Licensed Teen Drivers**

Saving lives
through research
and education

March 2012



Teen Driver Facts

- Teen fatal crash rates are roughly **three times** those of other drivers
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers in the United States
- Teens are thought to be at elevated risk for distracted driving-related crashes due to:
 - ✓ Inexperience behind the wheel
 - ✓ Ongoing development in areas of the brain responsible for decision-making and risk management
 - ✓ Avid use of technologies

The Study

Car crashes rank among the leading causes of death in the United States.



Distracted Driving Among Newly Licensed Teen Drivers

March 2012



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- Third part in naturalistic, three-phase study of 50 families in North Carolina with a novice teen driver
- Prepared by UNC Highway Safety Research Center for AAA Foundation
- Published March 2012

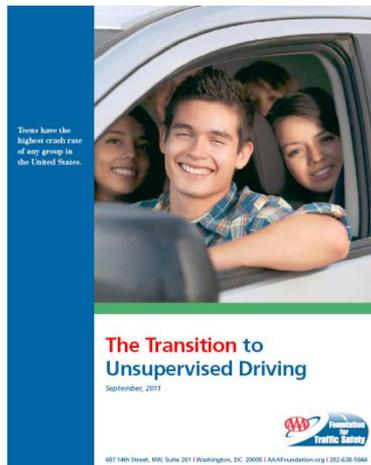
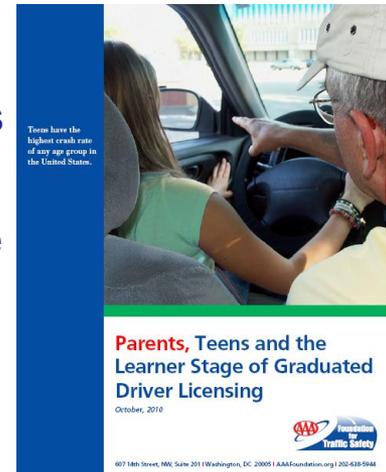
Available online at www.AAAFoundation.org



Method

- **Part I of study (2010):**

- ✓ 50 families recruited as teens applied for learner's permit in North Carolina
- ✓ **Naturalistic:** video cameras (triggered by change in g-forces) installed to capture video clips of the cabin and immediate vehicle surroundings



- **Part II of study (2011):**

- ✓ 38 families agree to continue participation once teens begin to drive unsupervised
- ✓ Cameras record clips of triggering events (e.g., hard braking, swerving, etc.) for teens for 6 months



Method

- Part III (2012 – current study):
 - ✓ Utilized video clips collected in Part II (unsupervised phase)
 - ✓ 7,858 clips from first six months of independent driving were re-coded to investigate distractions specifically and answer the six key questions

Six Key Questions

1. Which distracted driver behaviors are most common among teenage drivers?
2. Do males and females differ in how often they engage in distracted behaviors, or the kinds of distractions they experience?
3. Do distracted driver behaviors vary based on the number of passengers and the characteristics of those passengers?

Six Key Questions

4. Are distracted driver behaviors more common during certain times of day or week, and do these behaviors bear any relation to the amount of traffic or other characteristics of the driving environment?
5. Do drivers who engage in distracted behaviors spend more time looking away from the roadway than drivers who are not distracted?
6. Are distracted driver behaviors associated with serious incidents such as near-collisions, or events involving hard braking or swerving?

Key Findings: Question 1

Which distracted driver behaviors are most common among teenage drivers?

- **Use of electronic devices** was the leading distracted driver behavior, and was seen in 7% of clips
- Excluding electronic device use, teens were observed engaging in distracted behaviors in 15.1% of clips, including:
 - ✓ Adjusting controls (6.2%)
 - ✓ Personal grooming (3.8%)
 - ✓ Eating or drinking (2.8%)

Question 2

Do males and females differ in how often they engage in distracted behaviors, or the kinds of distractions they experience?

- **Yes!**
 - ✓ Females nearly twice as likely as males to use electronic device
 - ✓ Males roughly twice as likely to turn bodies around while driving
 - ✓ Excluding use of electronic devices, females slightly more likely to be observed engaging in a distracted behavior (15.6% of clips, vs. 13.9% for males)

Question 3

Do distracted driver behaviors vary based on the number of passengers and the characteristics of those passengers?

- **Yes!**
 - ✓ Electronic device use most common when drivers had no passengers, and least common when parents or other adults were in the vehicle
 - ✓ Drivers were 60% less likely to use an electronic device when carrying a teen passenger than when alone
 - ✓ Loud conversation and horseplay were more than twice as likely when carrying multiple teen passengers than when carrying just one

Question 4

Are distracted driver behaviors more common during certain times of day or week, and do these behaviors bear any relation to the amount of traffic or other characteristics of the driving environment?

- **Not necessarily:**
 - ✓ No clear pattern emerged in frequency of distracted driver behaviors on weekdays vs. weekends
 - ✓ No clear relationship was found between distracted driving and amount of traffic present (teens may not be adjusting behaviors to conditions)
 - ✓ Some indication that teens limited distracted driving behaviors in rain, but differences were small

Question 5

Do drivers who engage in distracted behaviors spend more time looking away from the roadway than drivers who aren't distracted?

- **Yes!**
 - ✓ Drivers were three times as likely to look away from the road when using an electronic device
 - ✓ They were two-and-a-half times as likely to look away when engaging in other distracting behaviors

Question 6

Are distracted driver behaviors associated with serious incidents such as near-collisions, or events involving hard braking or swerving?

- **Yes!**
 - ✓ Drivers were **six times** as likely to have a serious incident when there was loud conversation in the vehicle
 - ✓ They were more than twice as likely to have a high g-force event when there was horseplay

Discussion & Recommendations

- This study is one of the first naturalistic examinations of teen distracted driving
- Electronic device use is the most common – but by no means the only – source of distraction for teens

Discussion & Recommendations

- Peer passengers continue to be a major source of concern for teen driver safety
- Families should know and enforce state laws pertaining to distractions and teens – and can set their own rules where state law doesn't address the issue!

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For more information, go to:

AAAFoundation.org



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Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a not-for-profit, publicly funded 501(c)(3) charitable research and education organization. The AAA Foundation's mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by conducting research into their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce injuries when they do occur. This research is used to develop educational materials for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other road users.

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