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Drivers Over 65 Almost Twice as Likely as Middle-Aged Drivers to Die in Car Crashes, According to AAA Foundation Study

WASHINGTON, D.C., Feb. 18 - Drivers over the age of 65 are almost twice (1.78 times) as likely to die in car crashes as drivers age 55 to 64, according to a new study released today by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. The study found that the probability of death or injury in car crashes increase with age, as does the likelihood that an older driver will be involved in a left-turn crash, affected by illness, or suffer from lapses in perception that could contribute to a crash.

The "Older Driver Involvement in Injury Crashes" report also revealed that drivers over 75 were over two-and-a-half times (2.59) as likely to die in a car crash and drivers over 85 were almost four times (3.72) as likely to die when compared to drivers aged 55 to 64.

"As we age, our reaction time and other cognitive skills can diminish," said Peter Kissinger, President of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "For instance, our eyesight deteriorates to such an extent that by age 60 we require ten times the amount of light necessary to see an object as when we were 16."

Moreover, the population of seniors is increasing substantially - by 2030 one in five Americans will be 65 or older. "Thus, dealing with this vulnerable population represents a major public health issue."

The study also found that senior drivers are more likely to be involved in left-turn crashes as they age. The potential left-turn crash-risk is 25% higher for 65 year-olds and 50% higher for 85 year-olds compared to 55 to 64 year-olds.

In addition, when compared to drivers 55 to 64 those over 65 were more likely to have been ill or suffering from some other physical ailment and more often to have had perceptual lapses that contributed to their crash.

The Texas Transportation Institute conducted the study for the AAA Foundation. The findings are based on an analysis of 25 years of data involving four million injury crashes in Texas.

"Second only to teen drivers, older drivers are the second most likely group to sustain injuries or death in traffic crashes," said
Kissinger. "It is vital that seniors periodically and honestly review their driving performance."

The AAA Foundation suggests that both physicians and children of senior drivers can play a major role in assessing older driver's capabilities. Also, most senior drivers would benefit from taking refresher training or a driver improvement course, which in many states will qualify the individual for a car insurance discount. A wealth of resources for senior drivers, their children, and physicians are available at www.seniordrivers.org.

Research performed by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety can be found at www.aaafoundation.org. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is an independent, publicly funded 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization established in 1947 by AAA. 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.

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