



## FACT SHEET

### TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

# DRIVING SAFETY: A FACT SHEET FOR TEENS AND PARENTS

## Why is auto safety an issue for teenagers?

- Motor vehicle accidents (car crashes) are the number one cause of death among young people aged 16–20 years.
- Motor vehicle accidents are a significant cause of injury, with 500,000 injuries reported each year.
- Because motor vehicle accidents are so common and because they have such an impact on the health of teens, it is important to be well informed so that you can protect yourself or your teen while driving a car, motorbike, or motorcycle.

## Why are teenagers at risk?

- It is a well-studied fact that inexperienced drivers are more likely to have accidents than people who have been driving for a long time.
- Risk-taking behaviors, which are more common in teens, can include overestimating abilities and trying to “bend the rules,” (eg, running lights, not stopping at stop signs).
- Distractions are another major contributor to accidents. When you cannot concentrate, you cannot drive as carefully. There are some known distractions:
  - Other teen passengers
  - Music: radios, ipods, or other mp3 players
  - Cell phones
  - Rowdy passengers
  - Physical or sexual contact while driving
- Teens with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are between two and four times more likely to be involved in crashes.
- Some people cannot see as well at night, so nighttime driving can be an issue for some teens. Also, drag racing and cruising are dangerous.
- Extreme fatigue (pulling “all nighters” to study) is known to be a cause of driver error.

## Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol is a major cause of accidents.

- It is important to understand that even small amounts of alcohol can affect judgment.
- Many teens drink and drive anyway because they feel invincible and have the attitude that “it will never happen to me.”
- Prom season casts fear into the hearts of parents because of all the drinking and driving that goes on.
- Marijuana and other drugs, including prescription drugs, also affect judgment.
- You can be arrested, have your license suspended, or even go to jail if you are caught driving under the influence.

## The type of vehicle you drive can make a difference in your risk of accidents.

- Older cars have fewer safety features, such as airbags.
- Smaller cars and sports cars are more likely to be involved in accidents.
- Sport utility vehicles can roll over in accidents and cause injury.

## What can parents and teenagers do to decrease risk?

It is important to realize that it takes parents, teens, and authorities to work together to help keep teens safe when they're in a car. The following list gives suggestions on how adults and teens can help to prevent accidents:

- Consider a parent–teen contract for safe driving, including “unconditional pick up” when needed.
- Have rules regarding number of passengers allowed in the car.
- **Parents**—Control your teen’s access to vehicles.
- **Teens**—Show your parents how responsible you are, and you will get more access to the car.
- **Parents**—Serve as role models for safe driving: point out to your teens how you are driving safely.
- **Teens**—Remind your parents to drive safely.



- **Parents**—Set family restrictions and punishment for breaking the rules.
- **Teens**—Do not break the rules, and then you will not be punished.
- **Parents and Teens**
  - Refrain from alcohol and drug use before and during driving.
  - Do not drive if you are extremely tired.
  - Avoid road rage and remain calm behind the wheel.
  - Be aware of state laws; junior licenses, learning permits, and curfews are meant to protect new, young drivers.
  - Do not use cell phones or other electronic devices while driving; even “hands-free” cell phones should be used with caution.
  - Follow the speed limit.
  - Always wear seat belts; seat belts save lives. Teens are less likely to use seat belts than people in other age groups, so it is important to stress that seat belts are important.

Remember the saying, “be alive when you arrive.” If parents and teens follow these guidelines, many car accidents can be avoided, and the roads will be safer for everyone.

### For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

#### **American Academy of Family Physicians**

Telephone: (913) 906-6000 or (800) 274-2237

Web: [www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)

#### **Insurance Institute for Highway Safety**

Telephone: (703) 247-1500

Web: [www.iihs.org/default.html](http://www.iihs.org/default.html)

Teenager’s Web: [www.iihs.org/research/topics/teenagers.html](http://www.iihs.org/research/topics/teenagers.html)

#### **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

Telephone: (888) 327-4236

Web: [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov)

#### **National Safety Council**

Telephone: (630) 285-1121

Web: [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org)

Teen driving Web: [www.nsc.org/issues/teendriving](http://www.nsc.org/issues/teendriving)

#### **Teen Drivers Fact Sheet**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Telephone: (404) 639-3534 or (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636)

Web: [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/teenmvh.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/teenmvh.htm)