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Characteristics of Fatal Crashes Involving 16- and 17-Year-Old Drivers with Teenage Passengers

Published October 2012



Fact

- Motor vehicle crashes are the **leading cause of death** for teenagers in the United States
- Many states have enacted passenger restrictions for teen drivers, and overall teen traffic fatalities have dropped nearly 50% in recent years

Background

AAA Foundation research has found that:

- Risk of death to a 16- or 17-year-old driver skyrockets with teen passengers in the vehicle *(May 2012)*
- Driver distractions such as loud conversations and horseplay are more common with multiple teen passengers *(March 2012)*

The Study

Teens have the highest crash rate of any group in the United States.



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Available online at
www.AAAFoundation.org

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Purpose & Methods

- Examines characteristics of fatal crashes of 16- and 17-year-old drivers in relation to age, sex, and number of passengers present
- Provides state-by-state breakdown of data
- Analyzes Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) data from 2005-2010
 - Note: Virginia excluded from analysis because of under-reporting of passenger data

Key Findings

9,817 16-and 17- year old drivers were involved in fatal crashes from 2005 to 2010

42% had at least one teen passenger

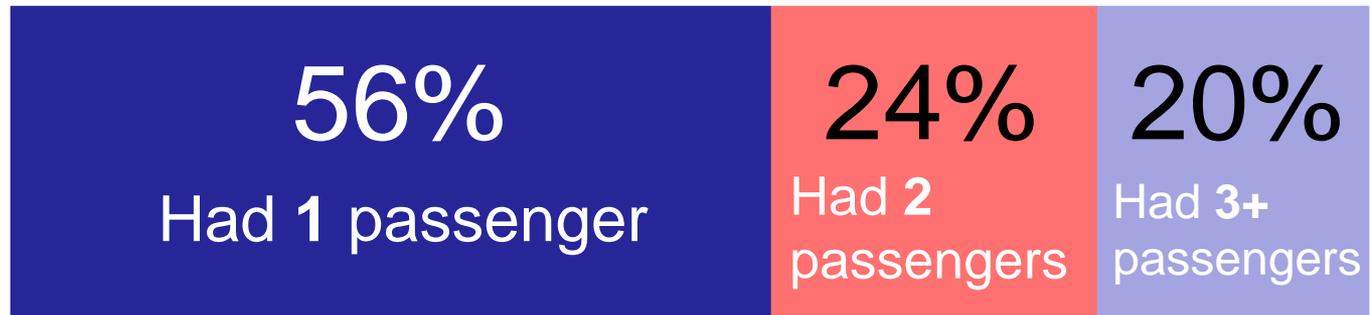
This proportion remained almost identical throughout study period, despite strengthening of passenger restrictions and overall decline in teen driver deaths

Note: All percentages are based on 9,578, the number excluding Virginia, which didn't report enough data for analysis



Key Findings

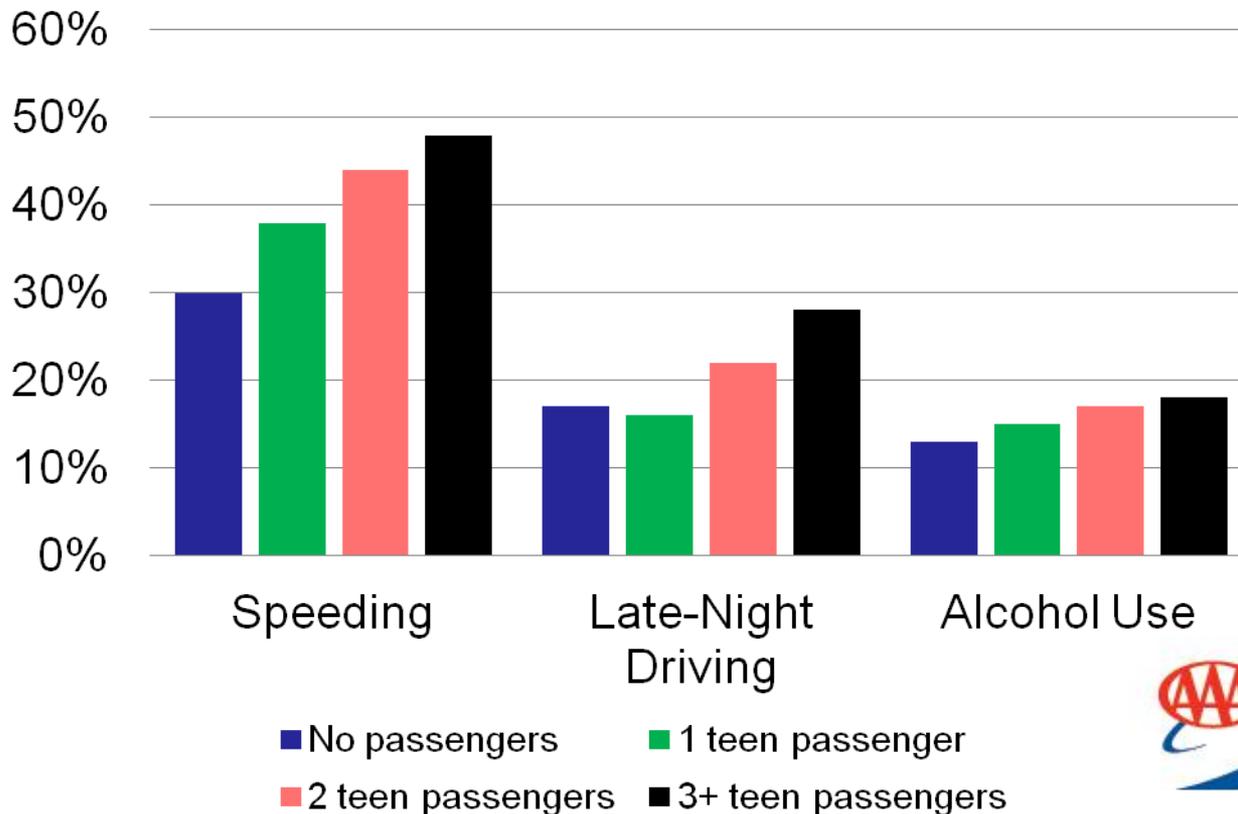
- Of the 16- and 17-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who were carrying teen passengers:



In general, passenger(s) same age and gender as driver

Key Findings

Among fatal crash-involved drivers, prevalence of **risky driving behaviors** generally **increased** with the number of teen passengers in the vehicle



Key Findings

- All risk factors more common for male drivers than female
- All risk factors (except for lack of a valid driver's license) were least prevalent when an adult (age 30+) was in the vehicle

Discussion

- Carrying teen passengers is still a major risk factor for young novices
 - Despite stronger laws and decline in teen driver deaths, the scope of the teen passenger problem relative to overall teen traffic safety remains virtually unchanged
- Adult passengers are a protective factor, and significantly reduce risks to teen drivers

Discussion

- 45 states and DC have passenger restrictions (though some allow 1 or even 2 teen passengers)
- “House rules” can’t violate the law, but they can strengthen it!
 - Just because a teen may legally be able to carry young passengers doesn’t mean parents have to let them – the risk of death is still the same!
- Other restrictions also help protect teens (e.g., limits on night driving)

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NEED TO KNOW

STATS ABOUT NEW TEEN DRIVERS AND THEIR FATAL CRASHES*

9,817

The number of 16- and 17-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes (2005–2010)



2 in 5

The proportion of these drivers with at least one teen passenger at the time of the crash.

The prevalence of certain risky driver behaviors generally grew with additional teen passengers in the crash:



Late-night driving



Speeding



Alcohol use



Seat belt nonuse



Invalid license

*AAAFTS Report: Characteristics of Fatal Crashes Involving 16- and 17-Year-Old Drivers with Teenage Passengers

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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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