

# INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

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## FEWER 16 YEAR-OLDS ARE GETTING INVOLVED IN CRASHES BIG DECLINE IN CRASH RATES OF BEGINNING DRIVERS OVER A DECADE

ARLINGTON, VA — The fatal crash rate for 16-year-old drivers declined sharply after states began enacting graduated licensing laws in the 1990s. Fatal crash involvements based on the population of 16-year-old drivers fell 26 percent during 1993-2003. This is the main finding of a new Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study.

### Licensing of 16-year-old drivers and fatal crash rates involving 16-year-old drivers

	Percentage of 16 year-olds licensed	Fatal crashes per 100,000 population
1993	42	31
1994	42	32
1995	43	35
1996	41	33
1997	43	31
1998	43	29
1999	37	29
2000	37	26
2001	34	24
2002	32	27
2003	31	23

The overall number of 16-year-old drivers in fatal crashes decreased from 1,084 in 1993 to 938 in 2003, while during the same period there was an 18 percent increase in the 16-year-old population.

"This isn't a study of graduated licensing per se. It's a look at the status of 16 year-olds in states both with and without graduated licensing. Still, this study does reveal some very positive effects of the new licensing systems. The main reason for the decline

in the crash rate is that fewer beginning drivers are getting their licenses when they turn 16," says Susan Ferguson, Institute senior vice president for research.

While the population-based ratio of fatal crash involvements declined, the 2003 rate based on the number of licensed drivers didn't change compared with the 1993 rate. Seventy-three 16-year-old drivers per 100,000 license holders were in fatal crashes in 1993. This compares with 74 per 100,000 in 2003.

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"In time we do expect to see a drop in the fatal crash rates per licensed 16-year-old driver," Ferguson says. "This will happen if more states implement stronger restrictions on night driving and on passengers in cars with beginning drivers. A number of states don't have these policies, and states that do often allow one or more passengers or apply the restrictions during short time periods. These restrictions are expected to have the strongest influence on fatal crashes per licensed driver. In the meantime, studies in several states that have looked at all police-reported crashes, not just fatal ones, have found significant declines per licensed driver."

Teenagers have the highest crash risk of any age group — about four times higher than for older drivers. Teenagers are more likely than older drivers to be in crashes involving driver error and speeding.

"The riskiest time for teens is when they first start driving," Ferguson points out. "The key to the effectiveness of graduated licensing is that it phases in a driver's license over time, keeping teens in the learner phase longer and delaying a full-privilege license until beginners are older, more mature, and more experienced."

An important finding of the new Institute study is that restrictions on 16 year-olds did not simply shift the crash risk to older teens. Crash rates dropped 11 percent for 17 year-olds and 6 percent for 18-19 year-olds.

One of the most dangerous scenarios is when a teenage driver transports other teens and, on a per capita basis, this kind of crash declined 39 percent during 1993-2003. Meanwhile, most other characteristics of 16 year-olds' crashes stayed the same over time.

A full graduated licensing law has three stages. Beginners must remain in each of the first two stages for minimum time periods: supervised learner's period; intermediate license (after the driver's test is passed) limiting unsupervised driving in high-risk situations; and then a license with full privileges available after completing the first two stages. Key elements of the intermediate stage

**Estimated crash reductions in selected jurisdictions with graduated licensing**

	<b>Crash reduction</b>
British Columbia	16%
California	0-28%
Florida	9%
Michigan	29%
North Carolina	23%
Nova Scotia	23-37%
Ohio	23%

**Note**

The percentage reductions shown for California are based on three studies, two of which found crash reductions of 17 and 28 percent. The percentages shown for Nova Scotia are based on two studies.

include limits on unsupervised driving at night and transporting teenage passengers. Certification by parents that a learner has driven a minimum number of supervised hours also is important.

"Parents are key to the success of graduated licensing," Ferguson adds. "The laws empower parents to set down their own rules of the road and enforce them. This is especially needed because the laws in many states still aren't strong. They don't all have three stages of a true graduated system, and some laws that do have the stages still don't restrict driving at night or with other teens."

**End of three-page news release on the effects of graduated licensing  
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