

Be Smart. Drive Smart.
Teen Survey
July 2007

New research by AAA reveals what teens are saying about how they and their friends are actually driving.

In a nation-wide survey of 1,000 16- and 17-year-old teen drivers conducted in April, 61 percent reported engaging in risky and unsafe behaviors while driving. Some of these behaviors are understood to be unsafe, while others may not be so well understood by teens and their parents, such as driving with teen passengers.

Of the 61 percent of young teen drivers who engage in these unsafe behaviors:
51 percent talk on the cell phone while driving
46 percent are text messaging while driving

Other significant findings include:
66 percent exceed the speed limit by 10 mph or more
11 percent have driven after drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs

58 percent of teen respondents said they drive with their friends in the car which can be a major distraction for teens. For drivers of all ages, driver distraction is a factor in 25-50 percent of all crashes.

Coupled with the problem of distraction for teens, is inexperience. Teens generally have not developed the ability to recognize hazards and anticipate events on the roadway – two key abilities that mature drivers use to help manage the impact of distractions while driving.

Of the 61 percent of teens who admit to engaging in risky driving, one in three (32 percent) send text messages while driving and more than 43 percent are reading them while driving. Regardless of what the law says about cell phones, teens and their parents should agree that this risky behavior can quickly lead to tragedy.

More than 8 out of 10 teens who admit to risky driving behaviors talk on a cell phone while driving. Unfortunately, holding or dialing the phone is not the only problem. The conversation itself is a distraction and takes drivers' attention off of the road and away from what they are supposed to be doing.

Two-thirds of teen drivers admit to speeding by more than 10 mph. A young driver who is speeding may not have the experience or presence of mind to prevent or avoid a situation that happens quickly, possibly resulting in a crash. Thirty percent of all fatal crashes each year are caused by speeding.

11 percent of teens admit to drinking and driving. Alcohol magnifies the challenges posed by teens' immaturity and inexperience driving. In addition to being unsafe, it's

illegal under “zero tolerance” laws for teens to drive after consuming even small amounts of alcohol. Thirty-nine percent of all traffic fatalities are alcohol-related (includes all ages).