

Graduated Driver Licensing System

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) encourages states to implement a graduated driver licensing system to ease young drivers into the driving environment through more controlled exposure to progressively more difficult driving experiences and driver licensing stages, prior to full licensure.

A significant percentage of young drivers are involved in traffic crashes and are twice as likely to be in a fatal crash as adult drivers. The problems contributing to their high crash rates include driving inexperience and lack of adequate driving skills, excessive driving during nighttime high risk hours, risk-taking behavior, poor driving judgment and decision-making, and drinking and driving.

To address these problems, NHTSA and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) developed an entry level driver licensing system. It consists of three distinct stages, named by the type of license possessed at each stage: learner's permit, intermediate (provisional) license, and full license. Young drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior in each stage of licensing before advancing to the next.

Key Facts

- In 1995, 6,220 young people, aged 15-20, died in motor vehicle crashes.
- Approximately 35 percent of all deaths for people ages 15-20 are from motor vehicle crashes.
- Young drinking drivers are involved in fatal crashes at twice the rate as drivers aged 21 and older.

- These young drivers are 6.7 percent of the total driving population, but are 14 percent of the alcohol-involved drivers involved in fatal crashes.
- In 1995, 71 percent of youth (age 16-20) who died in passenger vehicle crashes were **not** wearing safety belts.
- In the last two years, non-alcohol-related fatalities increased by 3 percent for youth aged 15-20.
- In 1995, almost one quarter of those who died in speed-related crashes were youth.
- States with nighttime driving restrictions or curfews for young novice drivers experience lower crash rates than comparison states.
- Graduated licensing has been shown to reduce crashes among youthful drivers.

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How Does Graduated Licensing Work?

The three stages of a graduated licensing system include specific components and restrictions to introduce driving privileges gradually to beginning drivers. Young drivers are required to demonstrate responsible driving behavior in each stage of licensing before advancing to the next stage.

Each stage has recommended components and restrictions for States to consider when implementing a graduated licensing system. Example components and restrictions of each stage include:

Stage 1: Learner's Permit

- Minimum age recommended by state (e.g., 15 1/2 years).
- Pass vision and knowledge tests, including rules of the road, signs, and signals.
- Licensed adult (at least age 21) required in the vehicle at all times.
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- Permit is distinctive from other driver licenses.
- Must remain crash-and conviction-free for six months to move to the next stage.

Stage 2: Intermediate (Provisional)

- Complete Stage 1.
- Minimum age recommended by state for an intermediate license (e.g., 16 years).
- Pass a behind-the-wheel, road test.
- All occupants must wear safety belts.
- Zero alcohol while driving.
- A licensed adult required in the vehicle during late night hours (e.g., nighttime driving restriction).
- Driver improvement actions are initiated at lower point level than for regular drivers.
- Provisional license is distinctive from a regular license.
- Must remain crash-and conviction-free for 12 consecutive months to move to the next stage.

Stage 3: Full Licensure

- Complete Stage 2.
- Minimum age recommended by state for a full license (e.g., 17 years).

How Many States Have A Graduated License System?

Although licensing practices vary from state-to-state, 10 states have a three stage licensing system with several of the recommended components of a graduated licensing system: California, Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Four states have two stages of licensing with several components: Illinois, New Jersey, Oregon, and Vermont. Ontario and Nova Scotia, Canada; New Zealand; and Victoria, Australia also have graduated driver licensing systems.

How Effective Is Graduated Licensing?

Evaluations in three states show the benefits of a graduated licensing system. California reported a 5 percent reduction in crashes for drivers ages 15-17. Maryland reported a 5 percent reduction in crashes and a 10 percent reduction in traffic convictions for drivers age 16-17. Oregon reported a 16 percent reduction in crashes for male drivers age 16-17.

An evaluation in New Zealand reported an 8 percent reduction in crashes for drivers ages 15-19.

Who Supports Graduated Licensing?

The following organizations have publicly supported a graduated licensing system:

- American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)
- Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (AHAS)
- American Automobile Association (AAA)
- American Coalition for Traffic Safety (ACTS)
- Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS)
- International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
- National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives (NAGHSR)
- National Association of Independent Insurers (NAII)
- National Safety Council (NSC)
- National Sheriffs' Association (NSA)
- National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

What Products and Services Are Available?

- Consultation on provisions and implementation of graduated licensing systems: from AAMVA and NHTSA.
- Testimony before state legislatures: from AAMVA and NHTSA.
- "Graduated Driver Licensing System for Young Novice Drivers," Guidelines for Motor Vehicle Administrators, NHTSA and AAMVA, DOT HS 808 331, January 1996.

- "Graduated Licensing System: Learning the Skill, Earning the Privilege," 2 Volume Resource Package, from AAA Government Relations.
- Video and media kit describing graduated licensing: from NAII.
- Video, "Young Drivers: The High-Risk Years," from IIHS.
- A graduated licensing resource kit which includes a model law, research studies, and questions and answers about graduated licensing: from NHTSA.
- Report to Congress, "Research Agenda for an Improved Novice Driver Education Program," (May 1994): from NHTSA.
- Evaluation studies from California, Maryland, Oregon, and New Zealand showing the benefits of graduated licensing: from NHTSA.
- National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Report to States, "Reducing Youth Highway Crashes," (March 1993).

Information Sources

American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)
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703-522-4200 (Fax: 703-522-1553)

National Association of Independent Insurers (NAII)
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All reports and additional information are available through your State Office of Highway Safety, the NHTSA Regional Office serving your state, or from NHTSA Headquarters, Traffic Safety Programs, NTS-24, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590, 202-366-4800.