



Research Notes

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Oregon Teen Licensing Changes Have Safety Benefits

Changes in Oregon's teen licensing laws that went into effect in March 2000 significantly strengthened the provisional driver license program, which had been in place since October 1989. Nearly all states and Canadian provinces have some form of a graduated driver license (GDL) program, but Oregon's is considered to be one of the most comprehensive.

As shown in the table below, data on the involvement of 16-year-old drivers in fatal and injury crashes seem to indicate that Oregon's GDL program has had significant safety benefits. In 2004 the rate of involvement of 16-year-old licensed drivers in fatal and injury crashes was 25 percent less than in 1999, the year before the expanded law went into effect. Crash rates declined for older teenagers as well, but at a rate closer to that of the rest of the driving population.

A recent study completed by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) for the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety compared GDL programs in place in Oregon and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. The TIRF study was designed to assess what components seemed to contribute to GDL program success and what improvements could be made.

Oregon GDL Highlights

- A safe driving practices knowledge test;
- Suspension for any measurable blood alcohol;
- Easily identifiable driver license;
- An instruction permit for at least six months prior to issuance of full driving privileges;
- Completion of at least 50 hours of supervised driving experience and an approved driver education course, or certification of completion of at least 100 hours of supervised driving experience;
- Nighttime driving restrictions which prohibit driving from midnight to 5:00 a.m., and passenger restrictions which can result in issuance of a citation if the police officer has probable cause to make a stop; and
- For drivers convicted of two traffic offenses or involved in two preventable accidents, an enhanced Driver Improvement Program that includes longer periods of license restriction and suspension.

Comparison of fatal and injury crashes in Oregon, 1999 and 2004

Age	1999			2004			% Change in Rate 1999-2004
	Licensed Drivers	Drivers in F&I crashes	Rate per 1000 drivers	Licensed Drivers	Drivers in F&I crashes	Rate per 1000 drivers	
15	19,122	61	3.2	15,629	46	2.9	-7.7
16	33,019	1,078	32.6	28,264	689	24.4	-25.3
17	38,770	1,262	32.6	34,209	960	28.1	-13.8
18	43,406	1,419	32.7	39,550	1,184	29.9	-8.4
19	45,858	1,187	25.9	44,243	1,087	24.6	-5.0
15-19	180,175	5,007	27.8	161,895	3,966	24.5	-11.8
All drivers	2,740,497	36,345	13.3	2,909,220	34,839	12.0	-9.7

Source: Oregon Department of Transportation

The TIRF study analyzed both crash data and the results of telephone interviews of teens and their parents (conducted in Oregon in 2005 by the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory). The results were published in a report entitled *Reducing the Crash Risk for Young Drivers* (<http://www.aaafoundation.org/pdf/ReducingTeenCrashes.pdf>). ODOT Research Unit staff reviewed the report to identify noteworthy findings about Oregon's GDL program.

Collision Involvement

- Young drivers who said they had been in a crash, on average, more frequently drove their own vehicle, drove more, and drove more for shopping and recreational or other social activities.
- Teens who received a traffic ticket had nearly four times the odds of having been involved in a crash as those who had not received a ticket. Speeding violations were the most frequent citations received.
- Collision-involved teens were more likely to engage in negative health behaviors than collision-free teens (smoked cigarettes, used drugs other than alcohol, did not wear a seatbelt).

Passenger Restrictions

Oregon teen drivers involved in crashes were much less likely to have passengers in their vehicles than Ontario teen drivers (about a third in Oregon, compared to over half in Ontario). In Oregon, for the first six months after obtaining a license, no passengers under 20 are allowed; and for the second six months, no more than three

passengers under 20 are allowed. Ontario has no such restriction.

Nighttime Restrictions

In 2002, only 1% of the crashes in Oregon involving 16-year-old drivers and 2% involving 17-year-old drivers occurred between midnight and 5 a.m. Data for Ontario, where there is no nighttime driving restriction, shows 6% of the crashes involving 16-year-old drivers occurred between these hours and 7% of the crashes involving 17-year-old drivers did.

Supervised Driving and Driver Education

About 65% of Oregon teens took a driver education course. Crash free Oregon teens were only slightly more likely to have taken driver education than crash involved teens. (64% versus 61% according to parents and 66% versus 60% according to teens).

Parental Management

Parents played a critical role in influencing their teen's attitudes and driving performance. This included supervision of driving, encouraging or requiring participation in driver education, and restricting driving. Parents rated themselves as being the strongest motivating factors for their teens to drive safely. Teens agreed.

Support for Laws

The survey of Oregon teens and their parents included a series of questions about support for teen driving laws. Eighty-three percent of the parents approved or strongly approved of Oregon's teen driving laws; 79% of the teens approved of the laws.

An additional report focusing on Oregon's GDL program is expected to be published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) later this year. When that report is available, the ODOT Research Unit will prepare a report on the findings of the two research efforts.

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