



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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ADPH initiates teen driver safety campaign

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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According to a nationwide study two years ago Alabama is next to the worst state in the nation in the rate of teenage driver fatalities per capita, second only to neighboring Mississippi. The Alabama Child Death Review System (ACDRS), an Alabama Department of Public Health program, is launching a teen driver safety campaign to educate and inform Alabamians about the factors that contribute to teen driver crashes, injuries and fatalities, as well as recent changes to the Alabama Graduated Driver's License (GDL) law.

Vehicular deaths account for approximately half of all preventable deaths each year for youth less than 18 years of age, and "driver inexperience" is cited as the cause in a large number of those deaths.

The campaign includes a new Web site (www.adph.org/teendriving) which provides injury and fatality prevention information for teen drivers and their parents. A corresponding brochure titled "Surviving Teen Driving: A Survival Guide for New Teen Drivers and Their Parents" is also available at the site. In addition, a 30-second advertisement is set to run in movie theaters statewide throughout August.

"We want teens and their parents to raise their level of awareness about the dangers associated with teen driving by knowing the factors that influence them," said Richard Burleson, director of ACDRS. "Vehicular fatalities are the largest category of nonmedical deaths for young people under 18. The newly amended graduated driver's license is being implemented to reduce deaths and injuries, and we want to ensure that everyone is aware of what it requires."

Three of the primary factors contributing to teen driving deaths are alcohol, lack of seat belt use, and distractions.

Alcohol and drugs negatively affect the safety and abilities of any driver, but teen drivers are more likely to be affected than adults. Even if no crash, injury or death occurs, there are very serious criminal consequences for operating a vehicle under the influence.

Teen drivers and passengers are less likely to wear **seat belts** than their adult counterparts, but are more likely to be in a crash in which seat belts could prove useful.

Distractions include having other passengers in the car, texting or talking on cell phones, eating or drinking, adjusting music on the road, or listening to music too loudly or using headphones.

Other factors which contribute to teen driver crashes, injuries and fatalities include:

- Speeding
- Aggressive, reckless driving
- Night-time driving
- Unlicensed and underage driving
- Unsafe vehicles and equipment

The Alabama GDL law was signed into law in 2002 and a set of 2010 amendments became effective July 1 for Alabama drivers 16 and 17 years of age. Under the GDL, drivers under 18 may not:

1. Have more than one nonfamily passenger other than the parent, guardian or supervising licensed driver at least 21 years of age. (New for 2010, reduced from four)
2. Operate a vehicle between 12 midnight and 6 a.m. unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian unless
 - Accompanied by a licensee 21 years of age or older with parental consent
 - Going to or from their place of work
 - Going to or from a school-sponsored event
 - Going to or from a religious-sponsored event
 - Driving due to a medical, fire or law enforcement emergency
 - Driving to or from hunting/fishing activities in possession of required licenses. (New for 2010)
3. Drive while operating any nonessential handheld communication device. (New for 2010)
Violations will result in an extension of the graduated license period and/or suspension of the license.

Statistics indicate that drivers age 16-19 are twice as likely to crash as those 20-24; three times as likely as those 25-29; and more than four times as likely as those 30-69. Among those 16-19 years old, the youngest drivers have the highest risk.

For more information, visit www.adph.org/teendriving or contact the ACDRS at (334) 206-2953.