

Safe Driving Teen Monthly Bulletin

Volume 92, Issue 54

January 2009

Teen Charged in Deadly Car Crash

An 18-year-old man has been charged with criminally negligent homicide, reckless driving, and speeding in the death of his 16-year-old friend. The friend was a passenger in the car, which was traveling almost 100 mph when the driver lost control and hit a tree.

Source: MSNBC.MSN.com ♦

Lessons Learned

Studies show that the presence of one passenger doubles the fatal crash risk for a teen driver, and the risk increases with each additional passenger. Forty percent of teen motor-vehicle deaths involve passengers.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among American teenagers, accounting for 36% of all deaths of teens aged 15-19. Two-thirds of the deaths of passengers in this age group happen in cars driven

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Published by the National Safety Commission
for Teens and their Parents



by other teenagers.

In a study at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, researchers discovered that:

A 16-year-old carrying one passenger is 39% more likely to get killed than one driving alone.

The likelihood increases 86% with two passengers and 182% with three or more.

The rate for 17-year-olds is still higher – 48% with one passenger, 158% with two passengers, and 207% with three passengers.

A 2008 survey by Erie Insurance Company found that although 91% of teens think they are driving safely, only 34% could say the same of their friends. Ninety-seven percent of the teens surveyed said they had seen other teen drivers participating in risky behaviors such as speeding and not wearing seatbelts. Forty-eight percent said they are easily distracted when friends are passengers. In a separate study by the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm, the number was even higher – 94% of teens said that passengers distracted the driver in some way; for example, by talking on a cell phone or listening to loud music.

Increasing the risk still further is the phenomenon of teen passengers not using seat belts. Studies show that even teens who buckle up as drivers often neglect to wear a safety belt when they are passengers in another teen's car.

Passenger restrictions for teen drivers are part of Graduated Licensing Laws in many states.

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Teen Faces Charges after Causing Crash

A 19-year-old woman will face motor vehicle, not criminal, charges for a crash that caused the death of a tractor-trailer driver. The teen says she fell asleep before her car crossed the center line and ran into a truck on a bridge, sending the truck into the water.

Source: *WMDT.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

A typical crash related to sleepiness has the following characteristics:

- Occurs during late night/early morning or late afternoon
- Is a single-vehicle crash
- Occurs on a high-speed road
- Driver does not attempt to avoid the crash
- Driver is alone in the vehicle

These factors have cumulative effects and a combination of any of these can greatly increase one's risk for a fatigue-related crash. The only way to reduce sleepiness is to sleep.

Before hitting the road:

- Get a good night's sleep. While this varies from individual to individual, sleep experts recommend between 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
- Plan to drive long trips with a companion. Passengers can help look for early warning signs of fatigue or switch drivers when needed. Passengers should stay awake to talk to the driver.
- Schedule regular stops every 100 miles or 2 hours. When you stop, stretch or take a short walk.
- Avoid alcohol and medications (over-the-counter and prescribed) that may impair performance. Alcohol interacts with fatigue, increasing its effects.
- Consult your physician or a local sleep disorders center for diagnosis and treatment if you suffer frequent daytime sleepiness, have difficulty sleeping at night often, and/or snore loudly every night.

You are at risk of drowsy driving if you:

- Are sleep-deprived or fatigued (6 hours of sleep or less triples your risk)

- Are suffering from sleep loss (insomnia), poor quality sleep, or a sleep debt
- Drive long distances without proper rest breaks
- Drive through the night, in mid-afternoon, or when you would normally be asleep
- Take sedating medications (antidepressants, cold tablets, antihistamines)
- Drink even small amounts of alcohol
- Drive alone or on a long, rural, dark or boring road

Signs that tell you to stop and rest:

- Difficulty focusing, frequent blinking, or heavy eyelids
- Daydreaming; wandering/disconnected thoughts
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven; missing exits or traffic signs
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating, or hitting a shoulder rumble strip
- Feeling restless and irritable

Remember – the only cure for sleepiness is sleep.

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Man Arrested for Providing Alcohol to Teen Who Died in Crash

A 41-year-old man has been arrested and charged with manslaughter for serving alcohol to a teen who died in a car crash. The 18-year-old man died shortly after leaving a party at which he and other teens drank alcohol served by the older man.

Source: *WRCBTV.com* ♦

Lessons Learned

Teens are at far greater risk of death in an alcohol-related crash than the overall population, despite the fact they cannot legally purchase or publicly possess alcohol in any state. (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

Did you know?

- During 2006, 7,643 15- to 20-year-old drivers and motorcycle operators were involved in fatal traffic crashes across the nation, 1,377 (18 percent) of whom had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .08 or higher.
- Nationally, 64 percent of all drivers or motorcycle operators ages 15 to 20 who were involved in fatal traffic crashes and had a BAC of .08 or higher died as a result of the crash.
- Violators of underage drinking laws often face a trip to jail, the loss of their driver's license, and dozens of other unanticipated expenses including attorney fees, court costs, and other fines. Plus, there is the added embarrassment, humiliation, and potential loss and consequence related to academic eligibility, college acceptance, scholarship awards, and more.
- Most of those killed in alcohol-related crashes involving teen drivers are the young drivers themselves and their passengers.

All states now enforce a minimum drinking age of 21. Nevertheless, alcohol related crashes are still a top safety problem.

Make sure you understand:

- Alcohol is not actually digested; it's processed. It's absorbed directly through the lining of the stomach into the bloodstream. This is why the body feels the effect so quickly.

- Alcohol has its first and greatest effect on the parts of the brain that control judgment and reasoning, the most critical skills needed by drivers. Physical abilities become impaired soon after.
- As more alcohol enters the bloodstream, the area of the brain that controls muscular movements and body control begins to slow down. Even after the driver recognizes danger, the brain takes longer than normal to process the information and react to the danger. Messages the brain sends to different parts of the body might become confused.
- A driver affected by alcohol has a decreased ability to reason clearly and to make sound judgments. However, the driver may feel as though thinking and judging abilities are sharper and quicker than usual.
- A person's driving ability can be reduced after only one drink.
- The muscular reactions of a driver who has been drinking can become slow and clumsy. Steering and braking movements can become uncoordinated. The driver might over-steer, brake late or not brake at all. The driver might not be able to negotiate turns properly and safely. Such actions cause drinking drivers to be involved in serious crashes.
- Alcohol affects the reflex action of the eyes. At night, this impairment can be critical. As headlights of oncoming vehicles come closer, the pupils of the eyes normally become smaller to shut out excess light. This reflex keeps the driver from being blinded by the glare of headlights. When the lights have passed, the pupils enlarge again to let in all available light. After drinking, this reflex action is impaired. The pupils do not become small rapidly as the bright lights approach, and they are slow to open after the bright lights pass. As a result, the driver can be blinded temporarily and may continue to have blurred vision some time after meeting each vehicle.



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Can You Get a DUI from Your Cough Medicine?

Many first-time drivers know that Driving Under the Influence (DUI) of alcohol is extremely dangerous. But they may not realize that the cold medicine they take could cause a level of impairment similar to that of drinking alcohol and in many states, could even result in arrest and conviction of DUI. Though over-the-counter drugs are legal, they are not always harmless.

Many teenagers will take over-the-counter drugs to stop a headache or relieve cold symptoms. Some take larger amounts of over-the-counter drugs to get high and feel good. Of course, this is particularly risky because taking any drug in large quantities results in a higher level of impairment, but it is important to know that even the recommended dosage of an over-the-counter drug can reduce your driving skills. Your coordination, decision-making, and reaction time can be affected.

Over-the-counter medications are required to have printed warnings about side effects, including driving risks. The bad news is, many people don't read the warning or they don't believe it is meant for them. If you don't understand these warnings, ask a pharmacist for help. Remember that many over-the-counter drugs, such as those that provide multi-symptom cold relief, contain several types of drugs in one pill. Select a medication that treats only the symptoms from which you actually suffer.

Here is a partial list of legal, over-the-counter drugs that could impair your ability to drive.

- Allergy medicines/Antihistamines
- Decongestants
- Cough syrups
- Motion sickness medication
- Ulcer medication
- Alcohol-containing medicines
- Caffeine-containing medicines

For example, antihistamines slow down reaction time, impair coordination, and can make you extremely sleepy - so sleepy you can't even hold your head up. Decongestants, which may be combined with antihistamines in multi-symptom cold medicines, can cause anxiety and dizziness. And though many people who take caffeine-containing medications do so to stay awake, the effects of these drugs don't last long and can end abruptly, leaving you even more tired than before

you took the drug. Caffeine is also found in many headache relievers - check the ingredients list of every medicine you take so you'll be aware of what you're taking and can consider the effects before you get behind the wheel.

Some over-the-counter drugs (such as cough medicine, which contains alcohol) may temporarily make you feel more alert and confident when you're driving. This is because your judgment is impaired, not because you're a better driver than you were before you took the drug. Drugs can fool you into believing you're in control of your driving when you are, in fact, impaired. Remember, you are responsible for making sure that you are unimpaired by any substance when you drive.

The effects of some over-the-counter drugs may not be apparent until an hour or two after you take them; never put yourself in the position of getting out on the road only to realize you are impaired. And not everyone reacts the same way to the same drug every time, so you could suffer unexpected side effects even if you've taken that particular drug in the past with no problems. Plan ahead. Ask a parent or friend to drive you if you need to go somewhere. Realize that if you're sick enough to need medication, the symptoms of your illness may cause enough impairment that you shouldn't drive, even if the medication itself doesn't cause problems.

Did you know?

- Taking sedating antidepressants even 10 hours before driving is equal to driving impaired.
- Ten mg of Valium can cause greater driving impairment than an alcohol concentration of 0.10.
- Even in the prescribed dose, the side effects of a prescription drug are beyond your control.
- More than 150 medications interact harmfully with alcohol.
- Overdosing on a narcotic could cause a person's breathing to slow down or stop and could cause death.

Some drugs, such as the stimulants used to treat ADHD, may make you feel alert and confident when you're driving. In reality, the situation may be quite different. Drugs can fool you into believing you're in control of your driving when you are, in fact, impaired.

Source: LowestPriceTrafficSchool.com ♦

Lessons Learned