

Young Drivers

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds.”

There were 202.8 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2006 (2007 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.4 percent (13.0 million) of the total, a 7.2-percent increase from the 12.1 million young drivers in 1996.

In 2007, 6,982 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes – a 12-percent decrease from the 7,936 involved in 1997. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 12 percent between 1997 and 2007. For young males, driver fatalities decreased by 3 percent, compared with a 13-percent decrease for young females (Table 1).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds (based on 2005 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 2007, 3,174 15- to 20-year-old drivers were killed and an additional 252,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.

Figure 1
Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers, 1997-2007

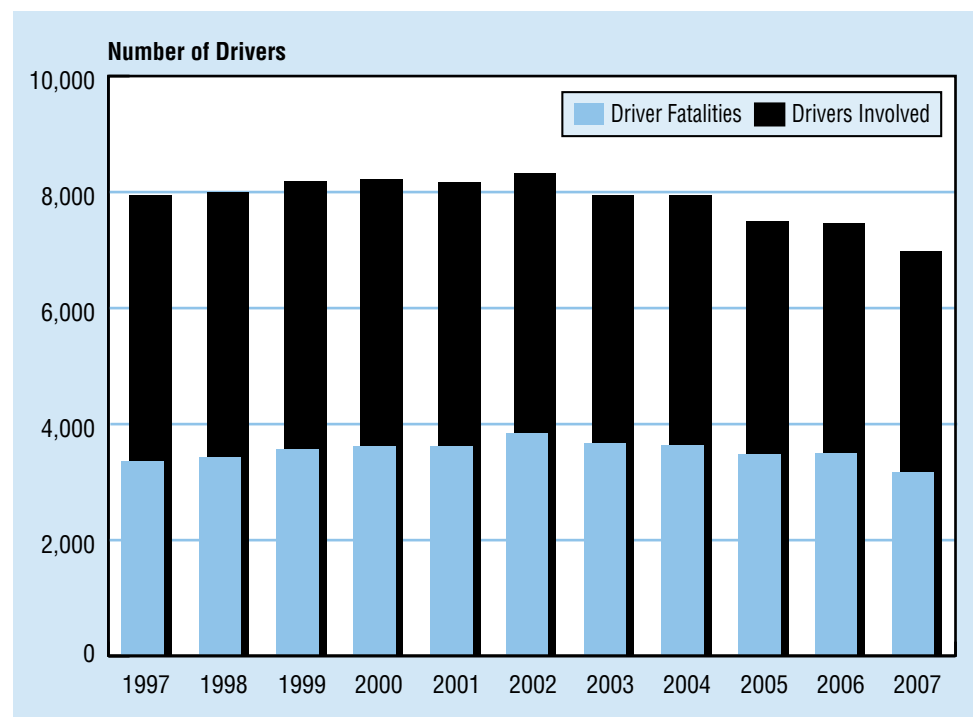


Table 1
Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes, 1997 and 2007

	1997			2007			Percentage Change, 1997-2007		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes									
Total	56,688	7,936	14.0	55,681	6,982	12.5	-2	-12	-10.4
Male	40,954	5,623	13.7	40,804	4,950	12.1	-0	-12	-11.6
Female	14,954	2,313	15.5	14,099	2,030	14.4	-6	-12	-6.9
Driver Fatalities									
Total	24,667	3,358	13.6	26,480	3,174	12.0	7	-5	-12.0
Male	17,879	2,399	13.4	20,384	2,335	11.5	14	-3	-14.6
Female	6,783	959	14.1	6,092	839	13.8	-10	-13	-2.6

Note: Excluding unknown ages.

“In 2007, 13 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”

In 2007, 13 percent (6,982) of all drivers involved in fatal crashes (55,681) were young drivers age 15 to 20 years old, and 15 percent (1,631,000) of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes (10,524,000) were young drivers.

Table 2
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes and Driver Involvement Rates by Age Group, 2007

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
2007 Population (Percent)	8.5	5.6	13.5	14.3	14.5	10.8	3.6	9.0
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
- Single-Vehicle	15.4	13.9	20.4	17.6	14.9	9.3	2.6	5.7
- Multi-Vehicle	11.0	9.8	19.0	18.3	17.4	12.0	3.4	8.9
- All Fatal Crashes	12.7	11.4	19.5	18.0	16.4	11.0	3.1	7.7

Note: Excludes unknown ages; 2007 licensed driver data not yet available.

Among 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2007, 31 percent (364) of those who did not have valid operator’s licenses at the time of the crash also had previous license suspensions or revocations (Table 3). For the same age group, 31 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2007 had been drinking (Table 4).

Table 3

Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Compliance, 2007

Driving Record	License Compliance				Total (6,982)*	
	Valid (5,734)		Invalid (1,173)			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	790	13.8	112	9.5	902	12.9
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	522	9.1	364	31.0	886	12.7
Previous DWI Convictions	67	1.2	44	3.8	111	1.6
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,226	21.4	206	17.6	1,432	20.5
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	986	17.2	212	18.1	1,198	17.2

*Includes 75 drivers with unknown license status.

Note: Excluding all drivers with unknown previous records.

“During 2007, 338 15- to 20-year-old motorcycle operators were killed and an additional 11,000 were injured.”

Motorcycles

NHTSA has recently redefined their motorcycle terminology. The following terms will be used to define motorcycle occupants; rider is the operator only, a passenger is any passenger excluding the rider, and a motorcyclist is any occupant of a motorcycle (rider or passenger). Prior NHTSA publications may not reflect this terminology.

During 2007, 338 young motorcycle riders (15 to 20 years old) were killed, and an additional 11,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 37-percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,784 motorcyclists of all ages in 2007, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 800 lives could have been saved.

During 2007, 35 percent of the motorcycle riders between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes in 2007, more than one-third (42%) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

Alcohol

All States and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. In 2007, 31 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 year old) who were killed in crashes had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .01 grams per deciliter (g/dL) or higher, 26 percent had a BAC of .08 or higher.

Drivers are considered to be alcohol-impaired when their BAC is .08 g/dL or higher. Thus, any fatality occurring in a crash involving a driver with a BAC of .08 or higher is considered to be an alcohol-impaired-driving fatality.

Table 4
Alcohol Involvement Among 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, 1997 and 2007

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage of Drivers With		
		BAC = .00	BAC = .01 - .07	BAC = .08 +
1997				
Survived	4,578	84	4	11
Fatally Injured	3,358	70	5	24
Total	7,936	78	5	17
2007				
Survived	3,808	84	5	11
Fatally Injured	3,174	69	5	26
Total	6,982	77	5	18

“In 2007, 26 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 years old) who were killed in crashes had a BAC of .08 g/dL or higher.”

Table 5
Young Drivers Fatally Injured by Age and Percent With BAC = .01 or Higher

Age	Number of Drivers	Percentage With BAC = .08 +
15	66	32
16	312	19
17	514	22
18	731	28
19	790	35
20	761	39

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 2007, 3 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 4 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 23 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

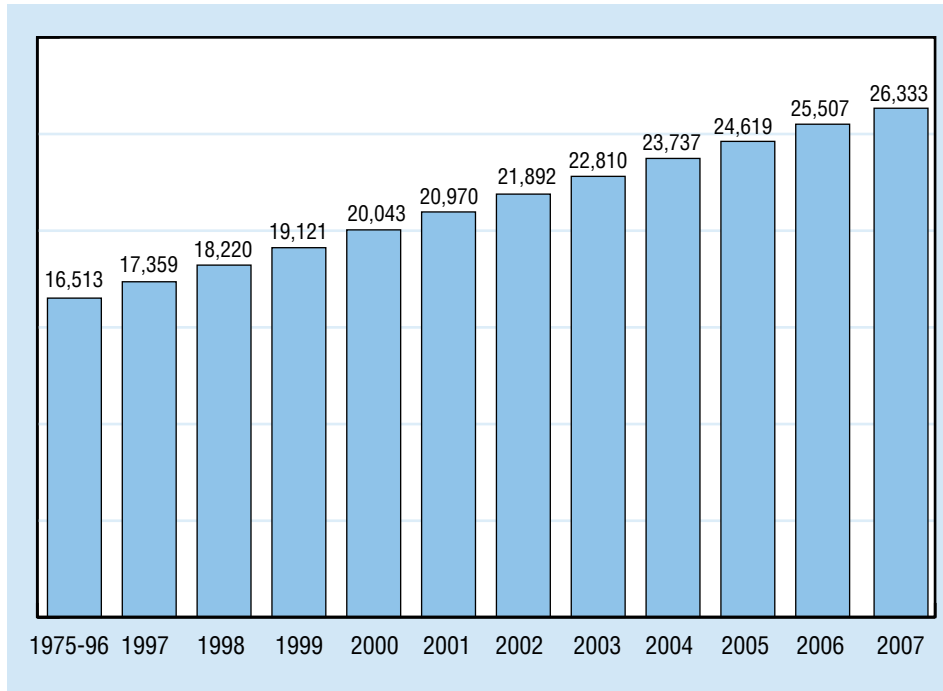
The percentage of 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had a BAC of .01 g/dL or higher dropped by 5 percent between 1997 and 2007.

For young drivers (15 to 20 years old), alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 2007, 26 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 14 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2007, 64 percent of the young drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 75 percent were unrestrained.

NHTSA estimates that the 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 26,333 lives since 1975. In 2007, an estimated 826 lives were saved by minimum-drinking-age laws.

Figure 2
Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2007



“NHTSA estimates that minimum-drinking-age laws have saved 26,333 lives since 1975.”

For more information:

Information on traffic fatalities is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NVS-424, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590. NCSA can be contacted at 800-934-8517. Fax messages should be sent to 202-366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at www.nhtsa.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/ncsa. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Vehicle Safety Hotline at 888-327-4236.

Other fact sheets available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis are *Overview, Alcohol, African American, Bicyclists and Other Cyclists (formerly titled Pedalcyclists), Children, Hispanic, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, Occupant Protection, Older Population, Pedestrians, Race and Ethnicity, Rural/Urban Comparisons, School Transportation-Related Crashes, Speeding, State Alcohol Estimates, and State Traffic Data*. Detailed data on motor vehicle traffic crashes are published annually in *Traffic Safety Facts: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System*. The fact sheets and annual Traffic Safety Facts report can be accessed online at www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Cats.

Table 6
Fatalities in Crashes Involving Young Drivers (Ages 15-20) by State and Fatality Type, 2007

State	Young Drivers	Passengers in Young Drivers' Vehicles	Occupants of Other Vehicles	Nonoccupants	Total
Alabama	107	51	39	10	207
Alaska	6	9	4	2	21
Arizona	77	47	45	14	183
Arkansas	66	34	28	5	133
California	238	199	157	75	669
Colorado	32	28	20	9	89
Connecticut	22	15	21	4	62
Delaware	10	6	5	2	23
Dist of Columbia	1	3	0	2	6
Florida	219	149	185	81	634
Georgia	120	95	74	11	300
Hawaii	6	1	12	3	22
Idaho	21	17	5	2	45
Illinois	118	80	53	31	282
Indiana	70	48	48	11	177
Iowa	39	27	23	7	96
Kansas	40	20	18	5	83
Kentucky	62	40	28	8	138
Louisiana	72	49	51	15	187
Maine	13	8	6	1	28
Maryland	45	28	20	20	113
Massachusetts	36	28	16	3	83
Michigan	93	60	67	18	238
Minnesota	45	19	30	4	98
Mississippi	88	32	34	6	160
Missouri	87	57	33	6	183
Montana	16	16	3	2	37
Nebraska	31	19	21	2	73
Nevada	28	11	23	10	72
New Hampshire	10	5	3	3	21
New Jersey	35	36	25	18	114
New Mexico	27	26	9	7	69
New York	93	54	49	40	236
North Carolina	121	64	79	31	295
North Dakota	13	8	3	0	24
Ohio	104	57	58	16	235
Oklahoma	57	33	27	8	125
Oregon	36	22	20	7	85
Pennsylvania	141	75	74	17	307
Rhode Island	6	7	3	0	16
South Carolina	75	51	44	9	179
South Dakota	9	5	7	2	23
Tennessee	117	48	58	7	230
Texas	251	162	162	51	626
Utah	24	13	16	6	59
Vermont	3	5	5	0	13
Virginia	86	58	34	11	189
Washington	49	30	20	10	109
West Virginia	32	20	11	4	67
Wisconsin	65	46	43	9	163
Wyoming	12	8	3	0	23
U.S. Total	3,174	2,029	1,822	625	7,650
Puerto Rico	39	20	21	13	93