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Risk of teen drivers extends to many others

AAA report: One-third of crash deaths involve pedestrians, others on road

AP Associated Press

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WASHINGTON - About one-third of the people killed in automobile crashes involving the nation's youngest drivers were pedestrians or occupants of other vehicles, according to a report released Wednesday.

An analysis of federal crash statistics by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that nearly 31,000 people were killed in crashes involving drivers between the ages of 15 and 17 between 1995 and 2004.

The foundation said it was surprised to learn that one-third of those deaths involved pedestrians and people in other vehicles.

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"While we may think of this as being a teen driver problem, it really affects a much broader audience," said Robert Darbelnet, AAA president and chief executive.

Safety groups said the statistics highlight the need for states to strengthen laws involving graduated licensing programs, which place restrictions upon beginning drivers and outline training programs.

"Highway safety programs to date have largely focused on the effects of these crashes on the teen drivers themselves, but this analysis shows that programs need to focus on the impact on others as well,"

NBC VIDEO



- **Study: Teen drivers a danger to others**
Jan. 18: According to a report by the AAA, about one-third of the people killed in car crashes involving teens are pedestrians or occupants of other vehicles. NBC's Tom Costello reports.

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said Lt. Col. Jim Champagne, chairman of the Governors Highway Safety Association.

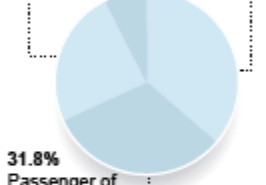
The report found that of the 30,917 deaths during the span, 11,177, or 36.2 percent, were the teen drivers. The death toll included 9,847 passengers of the teen drivers, or 31.8 percent; 7,477 occupants of other vehicles operated by drivers at least 18 years of age, or 24.2 percent; and 2,323 pedestrians and bicyclists, or 7.5 percent. There were 93 fatalities in which the ages of the victims were unknown.

Teens dangerous behind the wheel

Nearly 31,000 people were killed in crashes involving teen drivers between 1995 and 2004.

People killed in crashes from 1995-2004 involving... ... a 15- to 17-year-old driver

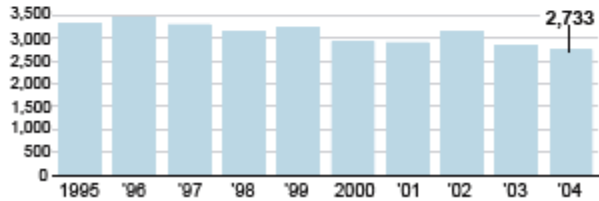
24.2% Other vehicle occupant
7.5% Non-motorist
36.2% Driver 15 to 17 years old



31.8% Passenger of driver 15 to 17 years old

NOTE: Figures may not add up to 100 due to rounding

People killed in crashes involving a 15- to 17-year-old driver



SOURCE: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

AP

Every state has some form of a graduated licensing program but they vary in their scope. Darbelnet said the foundation considers a comprehensive program to include at least 50 hours of supervised driving with an adult, restrictions of the time of day when a beginning driver can use a vehicle and limits on the number of passengers in the vehicle without a supervising adult.

Safety groups say distractions and risks grow sharply for teen drivers at night and when they travel with their friends.

"Regardless of what the state law says, parents should not allow their teen to ride with other teen drivers, nor should they be allowed to transport other teens in the first year of driving," Darbelnet said.

Kathy Fowler, 37, a medical reporter for WJLA-TV in Washington, survived a crash on a rural road in Ohio when she was 18. Two other people were killed in the accident.

"I guess as teenagers you think you're invincible, immortal," she said. "None of us realized back then that something we did in a split second could have such a lifelong impact and create so much pain for so many people."

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