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National News

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Study: Many Teens Tired and Distracted While Driving

January 25, 2007

Teen drivers are often behind the wheel when they are tired or being distracted by cell phone chatter or others' behavior, according to a new national survey of high schoolers.

In the survey, 5,665 high school students said they are driving under extremely dangerous conditions -- fatigue, talking on cell phones, strong emotions, multiple passengers -- and many are still not wearing seatbelts. The National Teen Driver Survey, released by The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm, represents 10.6 million 9th, 10th and 11th grade students in all public high schools in the United States.

"Research has told us a lot about which teens get into crashes, but we don't know enough about the why," says Flaura K. Winston, M.D., Ph.D., co-scientific director and founder of the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and principal investigator of the National Teen Driver study. "With this survey, we asked teens directly: what is happening when your peers drive that is making them unsafe?"

Key findings about the teen experience in cars shows:

- 75 percent of teens see peers driving fatigued
- 90 percent see passenger behavior that distracts the driver
- 20 percent of 11th graders report being in a crash as a driver in the past year

The survey also revealed the important role that the teens see for their parents:

- 66 percent say that they care about their parents' opinion on cell phone use while driving
- 56 percent of them rely on parents to learn how to drive
- 39 percent of their parents provide total financial responsibility for their driving

"Teens described a driving environment that would be challenging even to experienced drivers," says Winston. "Combine this driving environment with lack of training and inexperience and you have a deadly mix."

In 2005, almost 7,500 15-to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The fatality rate for drivers aged 16 to 19 years, based on miles driven, is four times that of drivers aged 25 to 69 years.

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"Our aim is to help young drivers make safe decisions," says Laurette Stiles, vice president for strategic resources at State Farm. "We want to give them tools to help them avoid hazards and ultimately to save lives and make our roads safer for all."

Parents and teens can learn more about safe driving for teens at <http://www.chop.edu/youngdrivers> and <http://www.statefarm.com/>.

Sources: State Farm
The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

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