

News Release
For Immediate Release

COVID-19 and Teen Safe Driving **Parents, Talk to Your Teen About Safe Driving**

With schools officially closed due to COVID-19 for at least the next five weeks, more teens may be tempted to be on the road. Hopefully, the need to shelter in place and maintain social distancing will prevent an increase in teen traffic crashes. As a reminder, car crashes are the leading cause of death for teens. The American Automobile Association (AAA) Foundation for Traffic Safety reports that the 100 deadliest days for teens are from Memorial Day until Labor Day because school is out, and more inexperienced teen drivers are on the road. Parents can play a role in reducing this risk, not only by enforcing shelter in place rules, but by spending extra time with family talking to their teens about safe driving.

Parents have more influence over their teens than they may think. In fact, leading experts believe parents play a key role in preventing teen car crashes and deaths. Teens with parents who set rules, monitor their driving, and are supportive are half as likely to crash and twice as likely to use seat belts as teens with less involved parents. Parents should get involved with their teens and stay involved through their teen driving years to make sure they follow good driving habits and to set good examples with their own driving behavior. Distractions, including other teens in the vehicle, speeding, nighttime driving, and lack of seat belt use are all factors that play a role in fatal teen crashes. Most of these are regulated by the Graduated Driver License Law (GDL), which parents should become familiar in order to protect teen drivers in the beginning stages of their driving.

The Texas GDL is designed to prevent cell phone use, limit the number of teen passengers that can legally ride with a novice driver, and also limit nighttime driving. The law provides parents with the controls to help keep their teen drivers safe. Many parents, however, are not aware of the provisions of this law — which is in force while the teen has a learner's permit, as well as a provisional license.

While cell phone use is an obvious danger for teen drivers, surprisingly a AAA Foundation study showed that the leading distraction for the teens was not cell phone use but interacting with other passengers in the vehicle. Cell phone use came in as the second most common distraction. Research shows that the risk of a fatal crash goes up in direct relation to the number of teens in a car. The likelihood of teen drivers engaging in risky behavior triples when traveling with multiple passengers.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Passenger Safety and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Community Health Educator, Kay Rogers, from Dallam & Hartley Counties, reminds parents to talk to their teens about safe driving and to follow these guidelines from the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration (NHTSA).

The NHTSA reminds parents to:

- Learn about the GDL law and be familiar with the restrictions placed on your teen's license.
- Talk to your teen about the dangers of distractions in the vehicle, especially other teens. Follow the GDL and do not allow your teen driver to have more than 1 person under 21 in the vehicle who is not related to them.
- Prohibit the use of cell phones while driving.

- Require seat belt use always.
- Talk to your teen about the dangers of drug and alcohol use. Remind them that it is illegal to drink under the age of 21, and it is illegal — and deadly — to drink and drive. If a teen is under 21, his or her blood alcohol concentration (BAC) should always be at .00, not just under .08, which is the legal limit for drivers over age 21.
- Be a good role model. Remember that your child looks to you as a driver, so practice safe driving yourself. Set aside time to take your teen on practice driving sessions. It can be a great way to spend time together and to allow your teen to improve some basic driving skills. Your teen's learning starts at home.

Bottom line is that as a parent you need to know the dangers that teen driving poses. You have more influence on your teen than you may think. Be a good example and get involved in their driving habits from the beginning and stay involved for the duration of their teen years. Stay safe during this current health crisis and put in place measures to keep your teen safe as they become a more experienced driver.

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