

New Analysis Provides Roadmap for Teen Driving Laws

by NAMIC

The following is a statement for attribution to Vernon F. Betkey Jr., chairman of the Governors Highway Safety Association:

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety released May 7 a new analysis of teen driving laws and their effectiveness at reducing crashes. IIHS concludes that states that have enacted strong graduated driver licensing laws experience a reduction in fatal crashes and insurance losses for collisions. States with license systems rated as "good" had 30 percent lower fatality rates than states with systems rated as "poor." IIHS's analysis provides a snapshot of the progress states have made on the teen driving issue and also offers a roadmap for future progress.

This is the first research that definitively shows which GDL components are effective. This report will help state legislatures that are contemplating improvements in their GDL laws. We commend IIHS for this invaluable research.

Based on the IIHS rating system, no states in 1996 had laws rated "good." Today, 31 states and D.C. are rated as "good." Twelve are "fair," seven are "marginal," and no states are "poor." According to GHSA, 49 states now have some type of three-stage GDL system. States have made tremendous progress at strengthening teen driving laws through a variety of advocacy efforts from the safety community and a growing body of research that shows the effectiveness of GDL legislation.

IIHS identifies the GDL components that states should adopt to further reduce teen crashes. The study found that strong passenger and nighttime restrictions are key in an optimal system.

Strong GDL components include:

Learners permit issued no earlier than age 16

Learner stage that lasts at least six months

Parents certify at least 30 to 50 hours of supervised practice during the learner stage

Intermediate stage that lasts until at least age 18 and includes:

Nighttime driving restriction starting at 9 p.m. or 10 p.m.

Passenger restriction (no teenage passengers or no more than one teenage passenger)

GHSA also includes a ban on cell phones and electronic communication devices as part of its suggested GDL language.

As the IIHS analysis indicates, it is time for a national discussion about increasing the driving age. Currently, most states allow learner's permits at age 15 or 15½. New Jersey allows a learners permit at age 16, but does not allow intermediate permits until age 17. With previous IIHS research indicating that the New Jersey law saves teen lives, increasing the driving age is clearly something for states to consider. Obviously safety concerns are paramount, but the political and economic issues surrounding teen licensing need to be addressed as part of the policy discussion.

GHSA strongly supports GDL laws and urges Congress to enact financial incentives to encourage states to continue improving their GDL laws.

The IIHS Teen Driving Analysis is available at www.iihs.org. State teen driving laws are posted at www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/license_laws.html.

Source: Governors Highway Safety Association

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