

# Traffic Safety Facts

2015 Data

February 2017

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## Key Findings

- In the 15- to 20-year-old age group, driver fatalities declined by 46 percent from 2006 to 2015.
- In 2015, there were 1,886 young drivers who died and an estimated 195,000 who were injured in motor vehicle crashes.
- 9 percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes were 15 to 20 years old in 2015. Young drivers accounted for 5.4 percent of the total number of licensed drivers in the United States in 2015.
- The rate of drivers involved in fatal crashes per 100,000 licensed drivers for young female drivers was 22.78 in 2015. For young male drivers in 2015 the involvement rate was 49.68, about 2.2 times that of young female drivers.
- During 2015, there were 247 motorcycle riders 15 to 20 years old killed in crashes, and an additional estimated 6,000 in that age group were injured.
- Of the young drivers with known restraint use, 54 percent of those who died in crashes in 2015 were restrained at the time of the crashes.
- Twenty-six percent of young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes in 2015 had blood alcohol concentrations (BACs) of .01 g/dL or higher; 80 percent of those young drivers had BACs of .08 g/dL or higher.
- NHTSA estimates that minimum-drinking-age laws (21 years old) have saved an estimated 30,860 lives since 1975.



U.S. Department of Transportation  
**National Highway Traffic Safety  
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## Young Drivers

The term *young driver* refers to a person 15 to 20 years old operating a motor vehicle involved in a crash. People in this age group generally obtain their licenses for the first time and many are under a graduated driver licensing program as they learn driving skills. Young, inexperienced drivers have higher crash rates than older, more experienced drivers in the United States.

In this 2015 fact sheet, the information on young drivers is presented as follows:

- Overview
- Fatalities
- Driver Involvement
- Motorcycles
- Restraint Use
- Alcohol
- Fatalities by State

This fact sheet contains information on fatal motor vehicle crashes and fatalities, based on data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). FARS is a census of fatal crashes within the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico is not included in U.S. totals). Crash and injury statistics are based on data from the National Automotive Sampling System (NASS) General Estimates System (GES). The NASS GES is a probability-based sample of police-reported crashes, from 60 locations across the country, from which estimates of national totals for injury and property-damage-only crashes are derived.

### Overview

In 2015 there were 1,886 young drivers 15 to 20 years old who died in motor vehicle crashes, an increase of 9 percent from 1,723 in 2014. Additionally, an estimated 195,000 young drivers were injured in motor vehicle crashes in 2015, an increase of 14 percent from 170,000 in 2014.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.<sup>1</sup>

There were 218.1 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2015. Young drivers accounted for 5.4 percent (11.8 million) of the total in 2015, an 9-percent decrease from the 13.0 million young drivers in 2006. Population for this age group decreased from 2006 to 2015 by 2.2 percent.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System, available at [http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/leadcaus10\\_us.html](http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/leadcaus10_us.html)

<sup>2</sup> Licensed drivers – Federal Highway Administration, Population – Bureau of the Census.

## Fatalities

Total fatalities in crashes with young drivers has decreased steadily over the 10-year period from 2006 to 2015, resulting in a 43-percent decrease in fatalities during that time, as seen in Table 1. Fatalities among young drivers and the passengers of young drivers declined

by approximately half (46% and 55%, respectively). Occupants of other vehicles decreased by 31 percent during the 10-year period. However, nonoccupant fatalities in young-driver-related crashes decreased by only 17 percent during the same 10-year period.

Table 1

**Fatalities in Crashes Involving Young Drivers, by Person Type and Year, 2006–2015**

Year	Young Driver (15–20)	Passenger of Young Driver				Occupants of Other Vehicles	Nonoccupants	Total
		<15	15–20	21+	Unknown			
2006	3,490	235	1,387	550	5	1,912	632	8,211
2007	3,190	223	1,371	443	7	1,829	631	7,694
2008	2,742	170	1,067	421	4	1,527	521	6,452
2009	2,343	145	958	351	2	1,381	469	5,649
2010	1,965	130	845	356	2	1,250	493	5,041
2011	1,993	118	777	298	1	1,122	473	4,782
2012	1,880	88	682	286	4	1,230	502	4,672
2013	1,696	120	633	313	3	1,133	469	4,367
2014	1,723	75	671	268	1	1,093	454	4,285
2015	1,886	101	614	259	1	1,315	526	4,702

Source: Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) 2006–2014 Final File, 2015 Annual Report File (ARF).

In 2015 young drivers who were involved in fatal crashes made up 40 percent of the fatalities in those crashes. Of those passengers who died in crashes where young people were driving, 63 percent (614 of 975) were also 15 to 20 years old. In 2015 there were more

fatalities of occupants in other vehicles during the crashes than there were fatalities of passengers of the young drivers; this has been the trend since 2012.

## Driver Involvement

There were 4,308 young drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2015 – a 43-percent decrease from the 7,493 involved in 2006. This 43-percent decrease is larger than the 16-percent decrease for all drivers involved in the same time period. Table 2 shows both involvement of young drivers in fatal crashes as well as young driver fatalities in fatal crashes.

In 2015:

- Young drivers involved in fatal crashes decreased from 2006 for both young male drivers and female drivers (45% and 37%, respectively).
- The two-year comparison of total driver involvement in fatal crashes increased by 9 percent from 44,671 in 2014 to 48,613

in 2015. During this same period young-driver involvement increased by 11 percent from 3,897 in 2014 to 4,308 in 2015.

- Total drivers involved in police-reported crashes increased by 4 percent to 11,251,000 from 10,773,000 in 2014. This compares to the number of young drivers involved in police-reported crashes, which increased by 7 percent to 1,406,000 from 1,318,000 in 2014.
- Nine percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes and 12 percent of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes were young drivers. However, young drivers were only 5.4 percent of all licensed drivers in 2015.

Table 2  
**Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes, by Gender, 2006 and 2015**

Gender	2006			2015			Percentage Change, 2006–2015	
	Total	Ages 15–20	Percentage of Total	Total	Ages 15–20	Percentage of Total	Total	Ages 15–20
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes								
Male	42,223	5,389	12.8%	35,472	2,984	8.4%	-16%	-45%
Female	14,753	2,104	14.3%	12,220	1,323	10.8%	-17%	-37%
Total	57,846	7,493	13.0%	48,613	4,308	8.9%	-16%	-43%
Driver Fatalities								
Male	20,732	2,574	12.4%	17,147	1,383	8.1%	-17%	-46%
Female	6,610	916	13.9%	4,994	503	10.1%	-24%	-45%
Total	27,348	3,490	12.8%	22,150	1,886	8.5%	-19%	-46%

Source: FARS 2006 Final File, 2015 ARF.

Note: Total includes unknown gender.

The rate of drivers involved in fatal crashes per 100,000 licensed drivers was higher for young male drivers compared to older male drivers. For young male drivers 15 to 20 years old, the driver involvement rate was 49.68 young male drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2015 per 100,000 licensed young male drivers. For female drivers of all ages, the highest involvement rate was 22.78 young

female drivers 15 to 20 years old involved in fatal crashes in 2015 per 100,000 licensed young female drivers.

The 15- to 20-year-old age group accounted for 10.4 percent of all drivers involved in single-vehicle fatal crashes, compared to 8.2 percent in multiple-vehicle fatal crashes, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
**Percentage of Population and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, by Age Group, 2015**

	Age Group (Years)								
	<15	15–20	21–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–69	70+
Population (Percent)	19.0%	7.9%	5.7%	13.7%	12.6%	13.4%	12.7%	5.0%	9.9%
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)									
- All Fatal Crashes	0.1%	9.0%	10.4%	20.7%	16.1%	16.5%	13.5%	4.7%	8.9%
- Single-Vehicle	0.2%	10.4%	12.4%	21.7%	15.5%	15.5%	12.5%	4.3%	7.6%
- Multi-Vehicle	0.1%	8.2%	9.1%	20.1%	16.5%	17.1%	14.2%	4.9%	9.8%
Licensed Drivers (Percent)	0.0%	5.4%	6.6%	17.6%	16.6%	18.1%	17.3%	6.8%	11.6%

Source: FARS 2015 ARF; Population – Bureau of the Census; Licensed Data – Federal Highway Administration.

Note: Individuals with unknown age were removed before calculating percentages.

Among young drivers involved in fatal crashes, 22 percent (139 out of 631) of those who did not have valid operator licenses also had previous license suspensions or revocations at the time of the

crashes in 2015 (Table 4). Note that FARS records drivers' previous driving records that occurred up to 5 years prior to the date of the crash starting in 2015.

Table 4

#### Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes, by Previous 5-Year\* Driving Record and License Compliance, 2015

Driving Record	License Compliance				Total**	
	Valid		Invalid			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total Drivers Involved	3,644	—	631	—	4,308	—
Previous Recorded Crashes	533	14.6%	59	9.4%	593	13.8%
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	210	5.8%	139	22.0%	350	8.1%
Previous DWI Convictions	19	0.5%	24	3.8%	43	1.0%
Previous Speeding Convictions	569	15.6%	95	15.1%	666	15.5%
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Convictions	520	14.3%	118	18.7%	639	14.8%

Source: FARS 2015 ARF.

\*FARS recorded previous driving records up to 3 years prior to the date of the crash in FARS 2014 and earlier.

\*\*Total includes drivers with unknown previous records.

## Motorcycles

The term motorcycle *rider* refers to the operator of the motorcycle only and the term *passenger* refers to any occupant not including the rider. The term *motorcyclist* refers to any occupant of a motorcycle, either the rider or the passenger.

During 2015 there were 247 young motorcycle riders 15 to 20 years old killed in crashes, an increase of 10 percent from 225 young motorcycle riders killed in 2014. An additional estimated 6,000 young riders were injured in 2015, a 12-percent decrease from an estimated 7,000 in 2014.

Helmets are estimated to be 37-percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcycle riders and 41-percent effective among motorcycle passengers. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,772 motorcyclists of all ages in 2015, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 740 lives could have been saved.<sup>3</sup>

Thirty-three percent of the motorcycle riders 15 to 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets (based on

known helmet use) compared to 39 percent of all motorcycle riders who were fatally injured in 2015.

Of the young motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes, 42 percent were either unlicensed or driving with invalid licenses compared to 27 percent of all motorcycle riders involved in 2015.

## Restraint Use

Of the 4,308 young drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2015, the restraint use of those drivers is known for all but 345 drivers. For young drivers with known restraint use, 54 percent of those who died in the crash were restrained at the time of the crash compared to 54 percent of all drivers who died. For those young drivers who survived the fatal crash, 86 percent were restrained compared to 90 percent of all drivers who survived.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2016, August). Lives saved in 2015 by restraint use and minimum-drinking-age laws (Traffic Safety Facts Crash•Stats. Report No. DOT HS 812 319). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Available at [crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812319](http://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812319)

## Alcohol

All States and the District of Columbia have 21-year-old minimum-drinking-age laws. Alcohol involvement includes a fatal crash in which a driver had a BAC of .01 g/dL or higher. A driver is considered to be alcohol-impaired when the driver's BAC is .08 g/dL or higher. Twenty-six percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes in 2015 had

BACs of .01 g/dL or higher; 21 percent had BACs of .08 g/dL or higher, as shown in Table 5. Thus, of the 494 young drivers killed who had alcohol in their systems, 397 (80%) were at .08 g/dL or higher (past the legal driving limit for those *legally permitted* to consume alcohol).

Table 5

**Alcohol Involvement Among 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, by Year and Driver Status, 2006 and 2015**

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	No Alcohol (BAC=.00 g/dL)		BAC=.01+ g/dL		BAC=.08+ g/dL	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>2006</b>							
Survived	4,003	3,301	82%	702	18%	522	13%
Killed	3,490	2,384	68%	1,106	32%	893	26%
Total	7,493	5,686	76%	1,807	24%	1,415	19%
<b>2015</b>							
Survived	2,422	2,066	85%	356	15%	275	11%
Killed	1,886	1,393	74%	494	26%	397	21%
Total	4,308	3,459	80%	849	20%	671	16%

Source: FARS 2006 Final File, 2015 ARF

The number of young drivers involved in fatal crashes who had BACs of .01 g/dL or higher dropped by 53 percent, from 1,807 in 2006 to 849 in 2015. However, 20 to 24 percent of these drivers in both years had BACs of .01 g/dL or higher.

Twenty percent of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes had alcohol in their systems as reported through FARS in 2015. This compares to 2 percent of young drivers who were reported by police to have alcohol in their systems during injury crashes and 1 percent

of young drivers during property-damage-only crashes, as reported through the NASS GES.

Among young drivers, 516 were killed at the age of 19 – highest among the young drivers; 28 percent of these drivers had alcohol in their systems at the time of the fatal crashes. Table 6 shows alcohol involvement for young drivers who were killed according to their age. The table clearly shows that of those young drivers killed, the percentage that involved alcohol generally increases as age increases.

Table 6

**Young Drivers Killed, by Age and Percentage With BAC=.01 or Higher, 2015**

Age (Years)	Total Number of Drivers Killed	Percentage of Drivers With BAC=.01+ g/dL	Percentage of Drivers With BAC=.08+ g/dL
15	39	25%	18%
16	147	13%	9%
17	268	22%	18%
18	404	25%	22%
19	516	28%	23%
20	512	31%	24%

Source: FARS 2015 ARF.

For young drivers in fatal crashes, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. Twenty-two percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2015 had been drinking at the time of the crashes (BACs of .01 g/dL or higher), compared with 15 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

In general, drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. Forty-five percent of the young drivers of passenger

vehicles involved in fatal crashes in 2015 who had been drinking were unrestrained (based on known restraint use). Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 60 percent were unrestrained (based on known restraint use). In comparison, of the non-drinking young drivers killed, 42 percent were unrestrained, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7  
**Young Drivers of Passenger Vehicles in Fatal Crashes, by Restraint Use and Alcohol, 2015**

Restraint Use	No Alcohol (BAC=.00 g/dL)		BAC=.01+ g/dL	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes</b>				
Restraint Used	2,289	78%	382	55%
Restraint Not Used	651	22%	314	45%
<b>Driver Fatalities</b>				
Restraint Used	608	58%	159	40%
Restraint Not Used	447	42%	235	60%

Source: FARS 2015 ARF.  
 Note: Based on known restraint use.

NHTSA estimates that the 21-year-old minimum-drinking-age laws have helped reduce alcohol traffic fatalities and have saved an

estimated 30,860 lives since 1975, as shown in Figure 1. In 2015 an estimated 537 lives were saved by minimum-drinking-age laws.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1  
**Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum-Drinking-Age Laws,<sup>4</sup> 1975–2015**



<sup>4</sup> National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2016, August). Lives saved in 2015 by restraint use and minimum-drinking-age laws (Traffic Safety Facts Crash•Stats. Report No. DOT HS 812 319). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Available at [crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812319](http://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812319)



## Fatalities by State

Table 8 presents the number of young drivers killed, as well as the numbers of passengers of young drivers, occupants of other vehicles, and nonoccupants killed in young-driver crashes for each State and the District of Columbia in 2015. Also included in Table 8 is Puerto Rico, which is not included in the overall U.S. total.

Among all States in 2015:

- Traffic fatalities in crashes involving young drivers ranged from 0 in the District of Columbia to 511 in Texas.

- The number of young drivers who died in crashes ranged from 0 (the District of Columbia) to 207 (Texas).

Additional State/county-level data is available at NHTSA's State Traffic Safety Information website at <https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/stsi.htm>.

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### For More Information:

Information on traffic fatalities is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA), NSA-230, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590. NCSA can be contacted at 800-934-8517 or by e-mail at [ncsarequests@dot.gov](mailto:ncsarequests@dot.gov). General information on highway traffic safety can be found at [www.nhtsa.gov/NCSA](http://www.nhtsa.gov/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 *Alcohol-Impaired Driving, Bicyclists and Other Cyclists, Children, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, Occupant Protection, Older Population, Passenger Vehicles, Pedestrians, Rural/Urban Comparison, School-Transportation-Related Crashes, Speeding, State Alcohol Estimates, State Traffic Data*, and *Summary of Motor Vehicle Crashes*. 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 found at <https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/>.



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Table 8

**Fatalities in Crashes Involving Young (15- to 20-Year-Old) Drivers, by State and Person Type, 2015**

State	Young Drivers	Passengers in Young Drivers' Vehicles	Occupants of Other Vehicles	Nonoccupants	Total
Alabama	51	28	40	13	132
Alaska	2	0	3	1	6
Arizona	34	16	28	15	93
Arkansas	22	20	24	3	69
California	146	102	118	65	431
Colorado	25	13	24	10	72
Connecticut	14	7	7	1	29
Delaware	8	3	6	2	19
District of Columbia	0	0	0	0	0
Florida	139	51	132	66	388
Georgia	77	38	51	14	180
Hawaii	5	6	2	1	14
Idaho	17	10	10	2	39
Illinois	63	33	42	11	149
Indiana	52	28	33	14	127
Iowa	31	19	11	5	66
Kansas	31	21	7	5	64
Kentucky	39	18	29	10	96
Louisiana	36	16	13	13	78
Maine	6	3	2	3	14
Maryland	20	10	14	3	47
Massachusetts	16	5	9	4	34
Michigan	61	29	49	25	164
Minnesota	26	11	25	4	66
Mississippi	53	31	21	7	112
Missouri	48	33	39	12	132
Montana	18	11	4	2	35
Nebraska	19	13	12	1	45
Nevada	16	12	7	8	43
New Hampshire	5	1	3	1	10
New Jersey	18	13	16	13	60
New Mexico	11	6	11	4	32
New York	34	27	27	18	106
North Carolina	76	24	57	18	175
North Dakota	11	3	5	0	19
Ohio	69	37	43	15	164
Oklahoma	51	25	28	7	111
Oregon	13	11	17	9	50
Pennsylvania	75	25	35	13	148
Rhode Island	2	2	1	3	8
South Carolina	45	22	45	12	124
South Dakota	6	3	3	0	12
Tennessee	51	15	38	5	109
Texas	207	115	127	62	511
Utah	12	8	17	2	39
Vermont	3	1	1	1	6
Virginia	39	14	20	5	78
Washington	30	14	18	8	70
West Virginia	15	7	5	2	29
Wisconsin	32	13	31	8	84
Wyoming	6	2	5	0	13
<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>1,886</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>1,315</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>4,702</b>
Puerto Rico	14	7	5	9	35

Source: FARS 2015 ARF.