

Young Drivers

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds.”

There were 205.7 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2007 (2008 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.4 percent (13.2 million) of the total, a 4.8-percent increase from the 12.6 million young drivers in 1997.

In 2008, 5,864 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes – a 27-percent decrease from the 7,987 involved in 1998. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 20 percent between 1998 and 2008. For young males, driver fatalities decreased by 19 percent, compared with a 24-percent decrease for young females (Table 1).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds (based on 2005 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 2008, 2,739 15- to 20-year-old drivers were killed and an additional 228,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.

Figure 1
Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers, 1998-2008

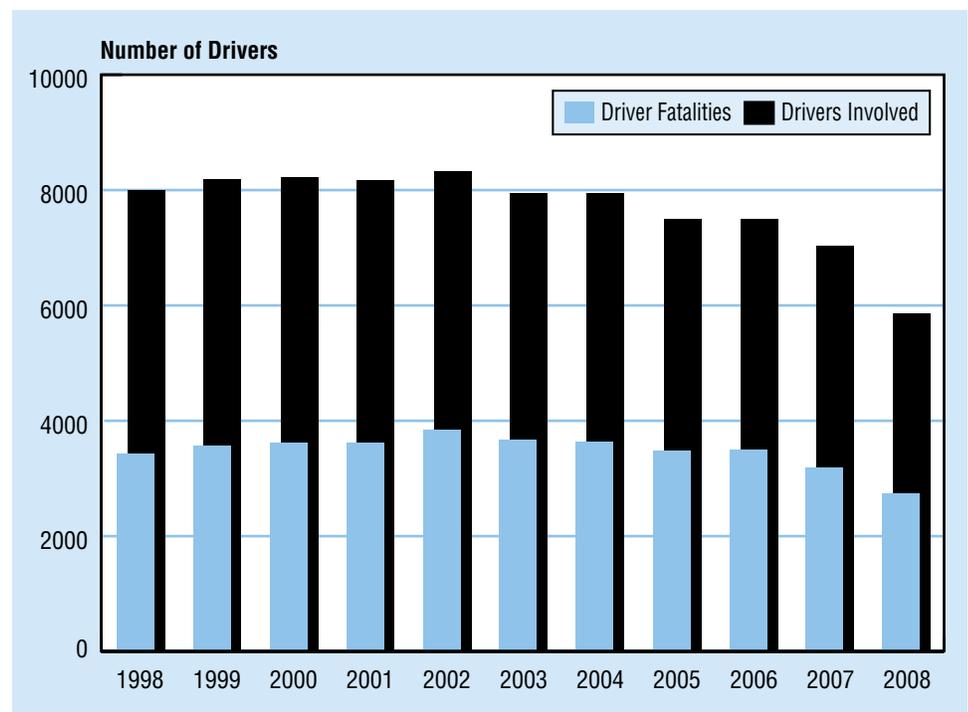


Table 1
Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes by Sex, 1998 and 2008

	1998			2008			Percentage Change, 1998-2008	
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes								
Total	56,604	7,987	14.1	50,186	5,864	11.7	-11	-27
Male	40,816	5,652	13.8	36,881	4,174	11.3	-10	-26
Female	15,089	2,335	15.5	12,568	1,688	13.4	-17	-28
Driver Fatalities								
Total	24,743	3,431	13.9	24,175	2,739	11.3	-2	-20
Male	17,992	2,476	13.8	18,694	2,010	10.8	4	-19
Female	6,750	955	14.1	5,473	727	13.3	-19	-24

Note: Total includes unknown sex.

In 2008, 12 percent (5,864) of all drivers involved in fatal crashes (50,186) were young drivers age 15 to 20 years old, and 14 percent (1,429,000) of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes (10,081,000) were young drivers.

Table 2
Population and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age Group, 2008

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
Population (Percent)	8.5	5.5	13.5	14.0	14.6	11.1	3.7	9.1
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
- Single-Vehicle	14.0	13.1	20.9	16.9	15.5	10.3	2.8	6.2
- Multi-Vehicle	10.4	9.2	19.0	18.3	17.8	12.4	3.5	9.3
- All Fatal Crashes	11.9	10.8	19.8	17.8	16.8	11.5	3.2	8.1

Among 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2008, 30 percent (291) of those who did not have valid operator's licenses at the time of the crash also had previous license suspensions or revocations (Table 3). For the same age group, 31 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2008 had been drinking (Table 4).

"In 2008, 12 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old."

Table 3

Young Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Compliance, 2008

Driving Record	License Compliance				Total (5,864)*	
	Valid (4,822)		Invalid (970)			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	748	15.5	96	9.9	845	14.4
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	433	9.0	291	30.0	727	12.4
Previous DWI Convictions	63	1.3	37	3.8	100	1.7
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,017	21.1	135	13.9	1,154	19.7
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	877	18.2	182	18.8	1,060	18.1

*Includes 72 drivers with unknown license status.

Note: Excluding all drivers with unknown previous records.

“During 2008, 346 15- to 20-year-old motorcycle riders were killed and an additional 8,000 were injured.”

Motorcycles

NHTSA has recently redefined their motorcycle terminology. The following terms will be used to define motorcycle occupants; rider is the operator only, a passenger is any passenger excluding the rider, and a motorcyclist is any occupant of a motorcycle (rider or passenger). Prior NHTSA publications may not reflect this terminology.

During 2008, 346 young motorcycle riders (15 to 20 years old) were killed, and an additional 8,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 37-percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcycle riders. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,829 motorcyclists of all ages in 2008, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 823 lives could have been saved.

During 2008, 35 percent of the motorcycle riders between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes in 2008, more than one-third (43%) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

Alcohol

All States and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. In 2008, 31 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 years old) who were killed in crashes had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .01 grams per deciliter (g/dL) or higher; 25 percent had a BAC of .08 or higher.

Drivers are considered to be alcohol-impaired when their BAC is .08 g/dL or higher. Thus, any fatality occurring in a crash involving a driver with a BAC of .08 or higher is considered to be an alcohol-impaired-driving fatality.

Table 4
Alcohol Involvement Among Young Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, 1998 and 2008

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	BAC = .00		BAC = .01 - .07		BAC = .08 +	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1998							
Survived	4,556	3,822	84	238	5	496	11
Fatally Injured	3,431	2,407	70	198	6	826	24
Total	7,987	6,229	78	436	5	1,322	17
2008							
Survived	3,125	2,659	85	148	5	317	10
Fatally Injured	2,739	1,901	69	144	5	694	25
Total	5,864	4,560	78	292	5	1,012	17

“In 2008, 31 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 years old) who were killed in crashes had a BAC of .01 g/dL or higher.”

Table 5
Young Drivers Fatally Injured by Age and Percent With BAC = .01 or Higher, 2008

Age	Number of Drivers	Percentage With BAC = .01 +
15	55	22
16	261	19
17	388	22
18	659	29
19	684	35
20	692	38

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 2008, 2 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 4 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 22 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

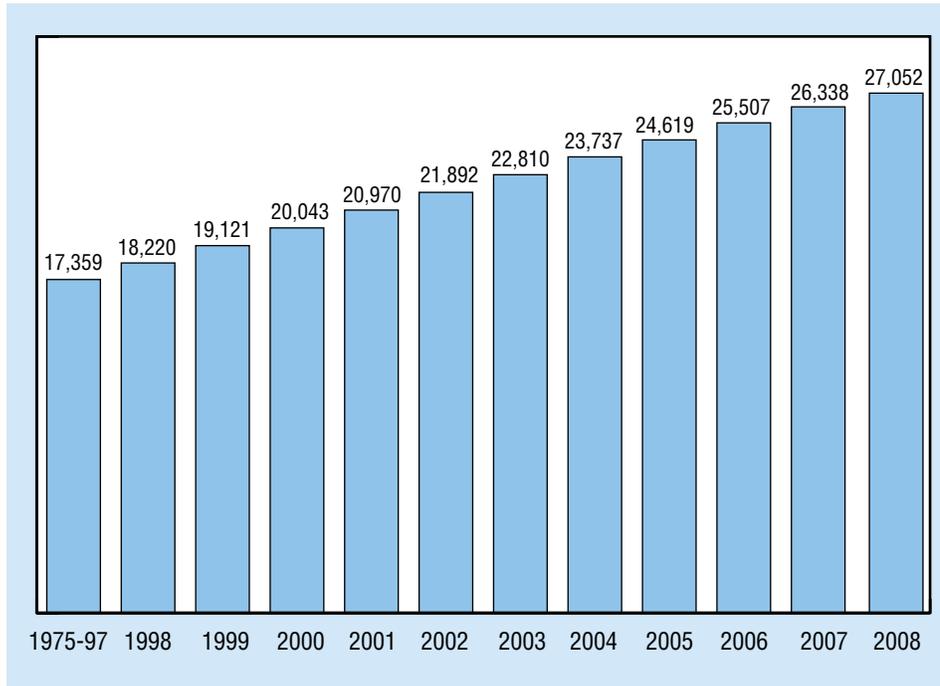
The number of 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had a BAC of .01 g/dL or higher dropped by 26 percent between 1998 and 2008.

For young drivers (15 to 20 years old), alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 2008, 26 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 13 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2008, 63 percent of the young drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 73 percent were unrestrained.

NHTSA estimates that the 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 27,052 lives since 1975. In 2008, an estimated 714 lives were saved by minimum-drinking-age laws.

Figure 2
Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2008



“NHTSA estimates that minimum-drinking-age laws have saved 27,052 lives since 1975.”

For more information:

Information on traffic fatalities is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NVS-424, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590. NCSA can be contacted at 800-934-8517. Fax messages should be sent to 202-366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at www.nhtsa.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/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 *Overview, Alcohol, African American, Bicyclists and Other Cyclists, Children, Hispanic, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, Occupant Protection, Older Population, Pedestrians, Race and Ethnicity, Rural/Urban Comparisons, School Transportation-Related Crashes, Speeding, State Alcohol Estimates, and State Traffic Data*. 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 accessed online at www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/CATS/index.aspx.

Table 6
Fatalities in Crashes Involving Young Drivers (Ages 15-20) by State and Fatality Type, 2008

State	Young Drivers	Passengers in Young Drivers' Vehicles	Occupants of Other Vehicles	Nonoccupants	Total
Alabama	93	39	34	6	172
Alaska	5	4	6	0	15
Arizona	48	54	37	11	150
Arkansas	53	31	23	5	112
California	217	161	148	67	593
Colorado	41	19	27	5	92
Connecticut	17	10	7	2	36
Delaware	6	1	13	2	22
Florida	195	106	153	62	516
Georgia	97	52	68	16	233
Hawaii	7	2	6	3	18
Idaho	23	14	6	3	46
Illinois	80	39	37	8	164
Indiana	78	46	32	6	162
Iowa	29	19	18	5	71
Kansas	34	21	7	5	67
Kentucky	57	46	27	8	138
Louisiana	62	38	33	16	149
Maine	13	2	2	2	19
Maryland	42	20	19	22	103
Massachusetts	31	17	10	10	68
Michigan	69	37	54	17	177
Minnesota	32	19	19	4	74
Mississippi	59	34	22	5	120
Missouri	88	62	39	6	195
Montana	19	9	5	2	35
Nebraska	25	14	12	1	52
Nevada	15	12	15	12	54
New Hampshire	12	9	4	2	27
New Jersey	36	29	24	20	109
New Mexico	24	20	11	4	59
New York	61	47	46	27	181
North Carolina	95	80	58	17	250
North Dakota	8	7	2	2	19
Ohio	80	55	62	14	211
Oklahoma	76	38	36	5	155
Oregon	21	17	4	0	42
Pennsylvania	112	64	52	14	242
Rhode Island	5	0	4	0	9
South Carolina	71	37	28	5	141
South Dakota	9	4	7	3	23
Tennessee	94	43	41	6	184
Texas	276	153	163	58	650
Utah	15	6	13	7	41
Vermont	8	5	1	0	14
Virginia	80	41	26	8	155
Washington	34	21	17	5	77
West Virginia	27	10	10	1	48
Wisconsin	49	32	29	7	117
Wyoming	11	8	1	1	21
U.S. Total	2,739	1,654	1,518	517	6,428
Puerto Rico	25	12	16	5	58