

Teen Licensing Survey

Teen Safe Driving (2010)

Unlikely Allies in Fight for Stronger Teen Driving Laws: Teens Themselves

A new survey by The Allstate Foundation found that teens believe there should be stronger laws related to earning driver licenses, indicating young people support policies likely to lead to reductions in teen crash rates and make the roads safer for all American families.

In November, 2010, The Allstate Foundation commissioned a survey of 15- to 18-year olds to determine teen licensing rates on a national basis, interest in early licensure and potential reasons for licensing delay. In addition, the survey set out to learn teenagers' opinions about licensing policies, especially key provisions in graduated driver licensing (GDL). The survey was conducted through online interviews among 1,383 teens nationally by Knowledge Networks, under the direction of Dr. Allan Williams, former Chief Scientist at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

While teen crash fatalities have decreased in recent years, too many young lives are still lost on our nation's roadways. Motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of death among all age groups from 5 to 34, with teens crashing four times more often than older drivers. Teen crashes are still a major health problem in the United States.

Stronger teen driving policies like GDL have been credited with saving young lives. GDL is a system that introduces young beginners to driving in a way that protects them while they are learning, keeping them out of higher risk situations while they gain experience on the roads. In its basic form, GDL includes an extended learner period of supervised driving, followed by an initial license with restrictions on late-night driving and transporting young passengers. A full license, allowing unrestricted driving is available after the first two stages. State and national evaluations of GDL have found crash reductions for 16 and 17-year-old drivers in the 20 percent to 40 percent range (Shope, 2007; Williams & Shults, 2010). However, many states do not have the full range of provisions endorsed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and other traffic safety experts.

Teen Licensing Rates

The Allstate Foundation survey indicated that most teens said they were interested in getting a license as soon as legally possible, but many had not started the process. At 16 years old, teens were about equally divided among those who had not started the licensing process, those in the learner stage of licensing, and those with a restricted or full license. At 18 years old, 62% of the teens surveyed had full licenses; 22% had not started the licensing process. For those old enough to start, lack of a car, costs, parent availability, ability to get around without a car, and being busy with other activities were leading reasons for delaying licensure.

Teen Views on Licensing Policies

Teens responded favorably to the concept of a single law that incorporates the key elements of graduated driver licensing. Teens were asked for their view of "a single law that includes a learner period starting at age 16, limits on late night driving and passenger limits for new drivers, prohibition of cell phones and texting, and 18 for a full, unrestricted license." The great majority (74%) of teens approved, 34% strongly approving, 40% somewhat approving, 18% somewhat disapproving and only 9% strongly disapproved. There was high and consistent approval of the comprehensive law by males and females, teens of all ages and all license status categories, geographic region, urban and rural status and race and ethnicity.

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Other key survey highlights:

The vast majority of teens (78%) approved of night restrictions. Of those who approved of the restrictions, 49% thought the start time for the night restriction should be 10 p.m. or earlier; 25% thought 9 p.m. or earlier.

The majority of teens (57%) were in favor of passenger restrictions. Sixty-nine percent thought none or one passenger should be allowed in the car; 28% thought no passengers should be permitted.

Bans on hand-held and hands-free cell phones and texting for young beginners were strongly endorsed. Eighty-five percent approved of cell phone bans (56% strongly approving), and 93% were in favor of texting bans (75% strongly approving).

The views of parents of teenagers on GDL have been well studied and found to be very supportive. A recent national survey found that parents of teens favored licensing policies that are as strong or stronger than exist in any U.S. jurisdiction (Williams, Braitman, & McCartt, 2010).

While parents overwhelmingly support strong graduated driver licensing policy, The Allstate Foundation survey demonstrates that a majority of teens have now also indicated support for increased measures that have been proven to protect teens on the road and make the roads safer for everyone.

Methodology

The national survey was comprised of 1,383 online interviews of teens between the ages of 15 and 18. Participants were drawn from a nationally representative panel of US households, using probability-based sampling. The survey was conducted in November 2010 by Knowledge Networks.