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SAFE KIDS WORLDWIDE™

Teens in Cars

June 2014



SAFE KIDS WORLDWIDE™

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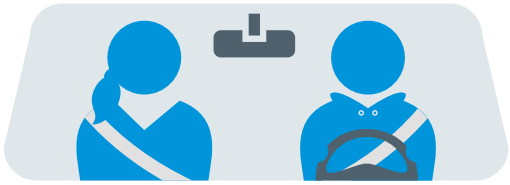
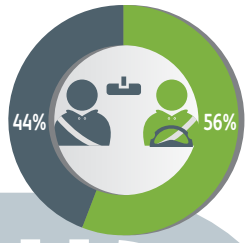


The number one killer of teens is motor vehicle crashes.

Fatalities are split almost equally between teen drivers and passengers.



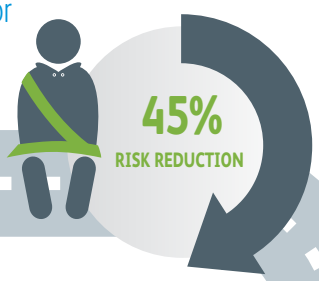
1 in 4 teens surveyed said they don't use a seat belt on every ride.



In half of fatalities, the teen was not wearing a seat belt.



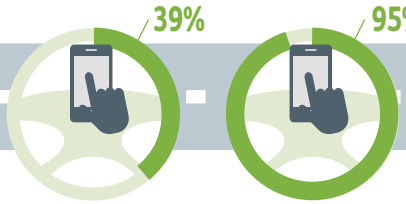
Seat belts reduce the risk of death for front seat passengers by 45 percent.



Teens who don't use seat belts are more likely to say they text while driving than those who do.



39 percent of teens said they have ridden with a teen driver who was texting, and 95 percent said they think other teens have done so.



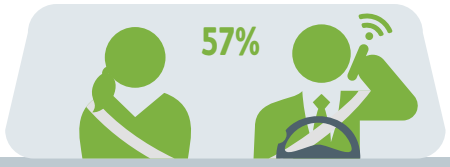
43 percent of teens reported riding as a passenger with a teen driver who was talking on the phone.

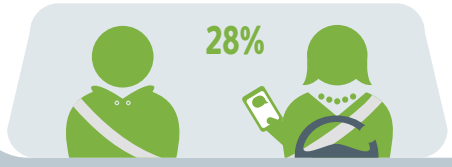


One study found that the odds of a crash or near-crash in newly-licensed teen drivers was more than 8 times greater when dialing a cell phone.



More than half of teens surveyed said they have seen a parent talking on the phone while driving.





28 percent have been riding in a car with a parent who was texting.

49% of teens reported feeling unsafe when riding with a teen driver.



31% when riding with a parent.



When someone was driving dangerously, 4 in 10 teens say they asked the driver to stop, but almost the same number said they did nothing.

Buckle Up and Speak Up
for a Safe Ride Every Time.

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Executive Summary

What if there was a disease that claimed the lives of 2,400 teens each year? A disease that was the leading killer of teenagers, that didn't distinguish between income or race, and could devastate any family? What if that disease could be prevented through available, inexpensive behavior changes?

Unfortunately this 'disease' exists: motor vehicle crashes result in more teen deaths than any other cause.[1,2] In 2012, 2,439 teen drivers and passengers died in motor vehicle crashes.[3] In half of these fatal crashes, the teen wasn't using a seat belt, and this proportion has been relatively unchanged over the last decade.[4] In both fatal and nonfatal crashes, a greater percentage of passengers are unrestrained than drivers.[4,5]

Through a grant from the General Motors Foundation, Safe Kids surveyed 1,000 teens ages 13 to 19 to explore why teens aren't using seat belts for every ride, and to understand their perceptions about their own safety when riding as passengers.

One in four teens say they don't use a seat belt every single time when riding with a teen driver without an adult in the car, and 84 percent think that other teens don't use a seat belt for every ride. The top reason that these teens gave for not buckling up is that they forgot or it wasn't a habit. And these habits start young; teens who don't use seat belts are more likely to say their parents don't use a seat belt every time they drive. Teens who don't use seat belts are also more likely to say they text while driving than those who do wear seat belts—a problem that we found was very common.

Thirty-nine percent of teens say they have ridden with a teen driver who was texting, and 95 percent say that they think other teens have ridden with drivers who were texting. These behaviors don't stop with teen drivers; more than half of teens say they have seen a parent talking on the phone while driving, and 28 percent have been riding in a car with a parent who was texting. We asked teens what they or another passenger did in a situation when a teen driver was driving dangerously. Four out of ten teens say the driver was asked to stop what they were doing. But almost the same proportion—39 percent—say they did nothing.

Riding as a passenger with a teen driver can lead to situations that make teens uncomfortable, and even concerned for their safety—49 percent say they have felt unsafe with a teen driver. In what is likely an eye-opener for many parents, 31 percent of teens say they have felt unsafe with a parent driving. It can be challenging to speak out when faced with a car filled with friends, or even to a parent who isn't driving safely. That's why it's important for teens to be prepared to be safe passengers today, so they can make safe decisions as drivers in the future. Here are some strategies for parents and families to stay safe while riding as a passenger and a driver:

- **Make using a seat belt for every ride a habit, starting when kids are young.**
- **Be a safety role model by observing speed limits, putting phones away while driving, and following the rules of the road.**
- **Talk to teens and kids about ways to speak up if a driver of any age isn't driving safely.**

Keeping teens safe in cars starts long before they are ready to drive or ride with friends. By following these tips, we can make sure that teens are making safe decisions when riding as passengers today and drivers tomorrow.



Presley's story

On a rainy fall night in October 2006, 15-year-old Presley Melton and her best friend, Lindsay Craven, 17, were coming home from a gas station, which was a mile and a half from Lindsay's house. Lindsay was driving and Presley was riding in the passenger seat. Lindsay hit a curve and lost control of the car. The car ran off the road, crashed into a ditch and flipped several times. Neither teen was buckled up. Both girls were thrown from the car and Lindsay died at the scene. Presley sustained multiple fractures to her face and body, remained in a coma for almost a month after the crash, and is still battling a severe brain injury. In memory of Lindsay, Presley makes it her mission to speak out to other teens about the importance of buckling up on every ride. "I don't want people to forget what happened to Lindsay," said Presley. "I lost my best friend because we didn't buckle up."

PRESLEY MELTON:

"I lost my best friend because we didn't buckle up."



Presley's best friend, Lindsay Craven

The Leading Killer of Teens

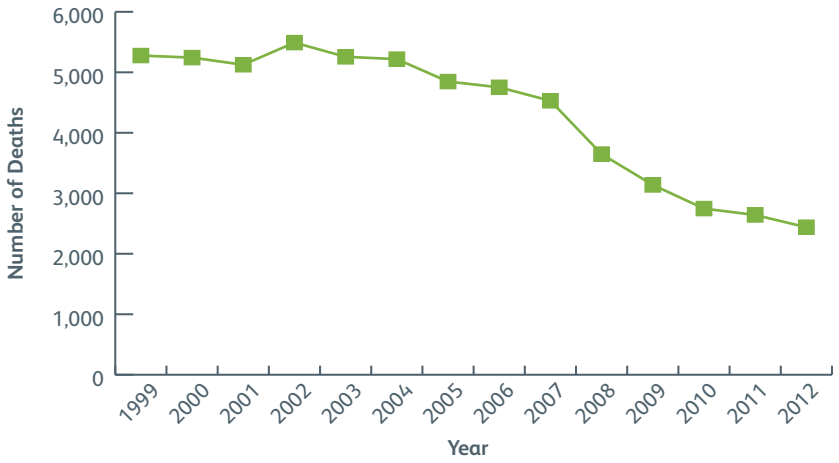
In 2012, 3,116 families lost a child in a motor vehicle crash.[6] Of these, 2,439 families—78 percent—lost a teen between the ages of 13 and 19.[3] Each year motor vehicle crashes claim the lives of 8 out of every 100,000 teens.[3,7] And motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens, resulting in more teen deaths than cancer, heart disease, congenital anomalies and cerebrovascular diseases combined (Figure 1).[1,2]

Figure 1: Car crashes are the leading killer of teens[1,2]

RANK	CAUSE OF DEATH	NUMBER OF DEATHS, 2010
1	Motor vehicle driver/occupant	2,747
2	Homicide	1,927
3	Suicide	1,863
4	Malignant neoplasms	792
5	Poisoning	770
6	Heart disease	405
7	Drowning	363
8	Pedestrian injuries	295
9	Congenital anomalies	254
10	Other land transport injuries	123
11	Cerebrovascular	99
12	Chronic lower respiratory disease	85
13	Influenza and pneumonia	63
14	Bicyclist injuries	63

Fortunately, we have seen a steady decline in the number of teens ages 13 to 19 who die each year in motor vehicle crashes—a sign that the efforts of government, non-profits and industry may be making a difference. Since reaching a peak of 5,491 deaths in 2002, the number of teens dying in car crashes has fallen 56 percent to 2,439 in 2012 (Figure 2).[8]

Figure 2: The number of teens dying in motor vehicle crashes has fallen 56 percent since its peak in 2002.[8]



WHY NO SEAT BELT?

"Because I hate wearing it and I only wear it when I'm driving."



WHY NO SEAT BELT?

"Sometimes I just don't think about it or care if it's a short ride."



A greater proportion of teen passengers are unrestrained in crashes than teen drivers.

Despite the good news, there is still a big challenge facing families—making sure that their teen isn't one of the 2,439 who don't see their next birthday.

One of the most important steps that anyone riding in a car can take to stay safe is to always use a seat belt, for every ride. And with seat belts available in every car, there's no reason not to use them. However, crash data shows that teens are often not using seat belts at the time of their crash. In 2012, 1,357 teen drivers, 1,065 passengers, and 17 unknown occupants died in fatal crashes. Of those, 46.8 percent of drivers and 54.2 percent of passengers weren't buckled up at the time of the crash.[4] In nonfatal crashes, we see a similar pattern but with much smaller percentages: in 2012, 5.6 percent of the 132,842 teen drivers injured in crashes weren't using seat belts, compared to 11.2 percent of the 111,377 teen passengers (Figure 3).[5] We hypothesize that the difference between fatal and nonfatal crashes might be a result of seat belts protecting teens who were nonfatally injured in crashes from being fatally injured. Additionally, the proportion of fatalities that weren't using seat belts at the time of the crash has changed very little over the last decade (Figure 4).[4]

Figure 3: A greater proportion of teen *passengers* are unrestrained in crashes than teen *drivers*.[4,5]

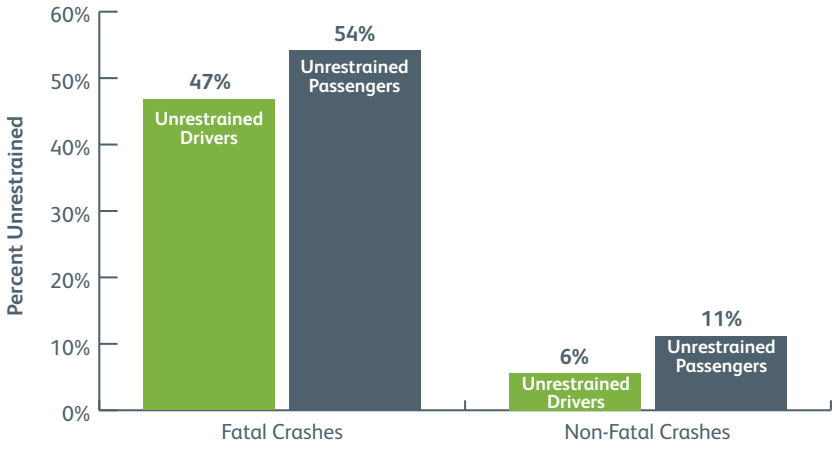
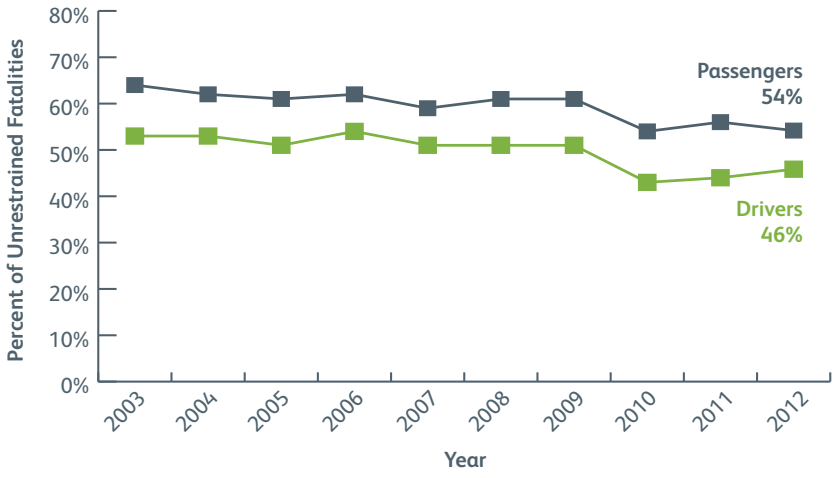


Figure 4: Half of teen passengers who die are not buckled up—and there hasn't been a substantial change over the last decade.[4]



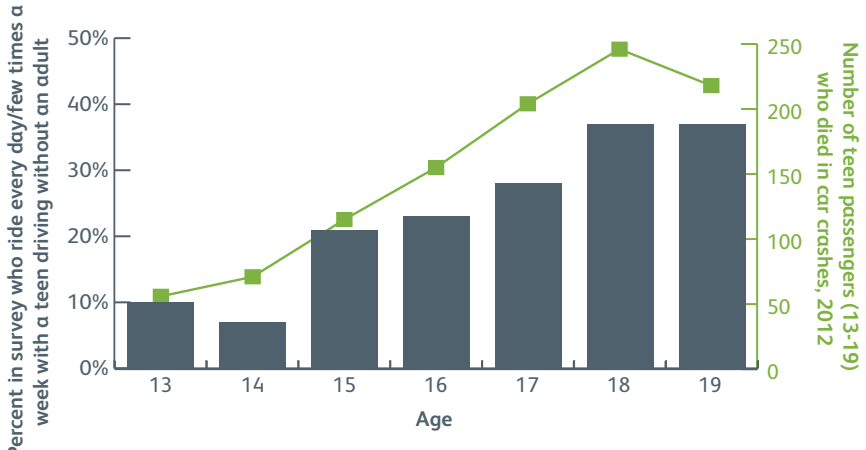
Given that half of the teens who die in car crashes weren't using their seat belt at the time of the crash, we wanted to explore why teens don't always buckle up and why they thought other teens might not wear seat belts. We also wanted to know if teens felt safe riding as passengers with a teen driver, the types of risky situations they've been in—such as riding with a teen driver who was texting—and what they did about it.

Riding in Cars with Teens

To explore the behaviors and thoughts of teens when they ride with a teen driver, we surveyed 1,051 teens between the ages of 13 and 19. We asked about how often they ride with a teen driver, whether they use a seat belt, and their perceptions about other teens' seat belt use.

We found that beginning at age 15, teens ride more regularly with teen drivers. Ten percent of 13-year-olds say they ride every day or a few times a week with a teen driver, compared to 23 percent of 16-year-olds (Figure 5). Along with more frequent exposure to risky situations, however, comes greater risk: three times as many 16-year-old passengers die in car crashes, compared to 13-year-olds.[3] Previous research has found that, compared to teen drivers who aren't transporting any teen passengers, having one passenger in the car who is under 21 years old increases the risk of a crash by 44 percent; two passengers doubles the risk; and three or more passengers increases the risk four-fold, when no adult passengers are present.[9] Another study found that in 42 percent of fatal crashes involving a 16- or 17-year-old driver, all of the passengers in the car were between the ages of 13 and 19.[10]

Figure 5: Beginning at age 15, more teens regularly ride with a teen driver—and the number of teen passengers who die in crashes increases, too.[3]





WHY NO SEAT BELT?

"We might be going to the grocery store right around the block."

Seat Belts

We found that one in four teens say they don't use a seat belt every single time they ride with a teen driver without an adult (Figure 6). Yet wearing a seat belt is one of the easiest and most effective ways to stay safe as a driver or passenger. In addition to being available in all cars, when used, seat belts reduce the risk of death for front seat passengers by 45 percent.[12]



One in four teens doesn't use a seat belt every single time when riding with a teen driver without an adult in the car.

In our survey, we found that there are some important differences between teens who use a seat belt every time they ride with a teen driver, and those who don't (Figure 7). For example, we found in the survey that teens who don't use a seat belt every time are more likely to have parents who don't always use seat belts. And the top reason teens gave for why they didn't use a seat belt every time when riding with a teen driver was that they forgot or it wasn't a habit (34 percent) (Figure 8). They also said they wouldn't use a seat belt if they weren't traveling far (16 percent), if the seat belts were uncomfortable (11 percent), or if they were in a hurry (5 percent). This data, on top of the fact that many of these teens admitted their parents don't use a seat belt every time, suggests that buckling up is a practice that starts young—when children are riding in car seats and watching their parents behavior over many years.

When teenagers were asked whether other teens always used their seat belts, their perspectives changed. Although 77 percent of teens say they use a seat belt every single time they ride with a teen driver, only 16 percent think other teens use a seat belt every time when riding with a teen driver. Eight out of ten teens think other teens are less likely to buckle up when not driving far, and half said that not having enough seat belts in the car for all the passengers was a reason (Figure 9). Thirty-three percent said that going to a party was a reason why teens might not wear seat belts; girls were more likely (36 percent) than boys (29 percent) to use this reasoning. Using a seat belt isn't important just for the passenger's safety; a study found that having a passenger who wasn't using a seat belt sitting behind a restrained driver increased the risk of death to the driver by 137 percent, compared to having a passenger who was using a seat belt behind them.[13]

Figure 6: One in four teens doesn't use a seat belt every single time when riding with a teen driver without an adult in the car.

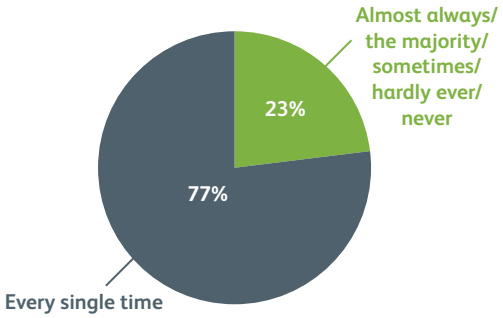


Figure 7: Teens who don't use a seat belt every single time are more likely to...

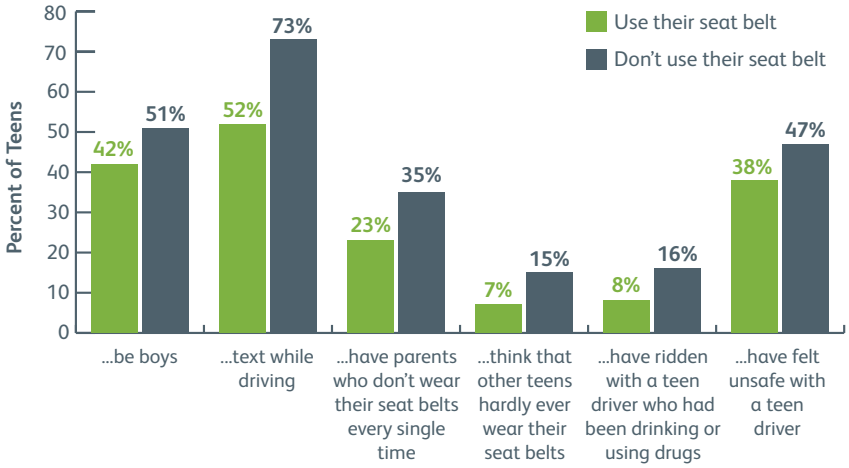


Figure 8: Why don't you use your seat belt every single time?

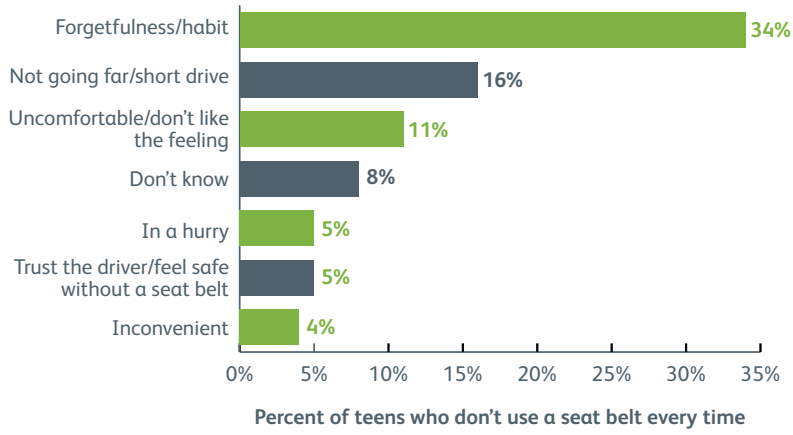
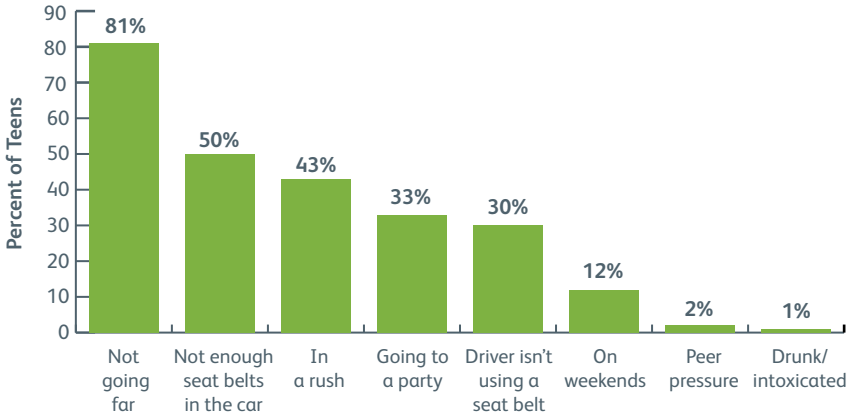


Figure 9: Why do you think other teens are less likely to buckle up?



WHY NO SEAT BELT?

"IDK. I just don't because most of the people I ride with don't have it on either."

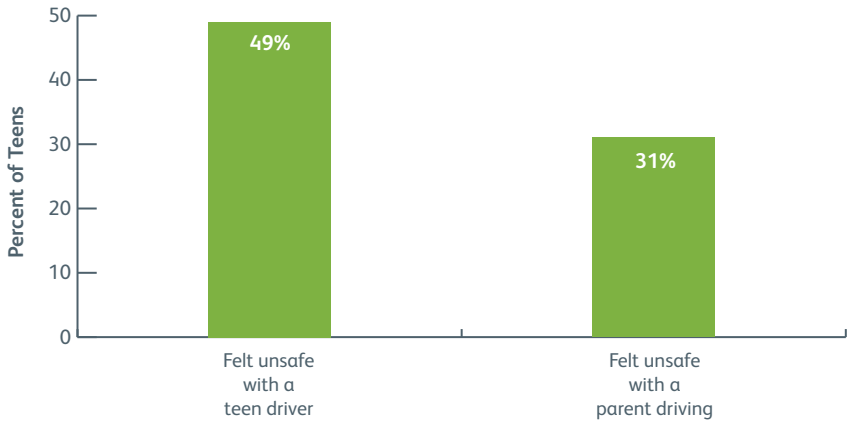
EVER FELT UNSAFE WITH ANOTHER TEEN DRIVER?

"He was drinking and wouldn't let anyone else drive his car. He kept going really fast then really slow and ran a red light. He ended up parking half on a curb half off when we got to the party."

Teen Passengers Are Concerned about Their Safety

Forty-nine percent of teens say there has been a time when they felt unsafe riding with a teen driver without an adult in the car, and 31 percent have felt unsafe with a parent driving (Figure 10). The fact that such a large proportion of teens have felt unsafe as a passenger is alarming. Given that so many teens were concerned about their safety, we wanted to understand what types of situations teens were confronted with as passengers.

Figure 10: Half of teens have felt unsafe with a teen driver, and 31 percent have felt unsafe with a parent driving.



Four out of 10 teens report riding as a passenger with a teen driver who was talking on a phone (Figure 11). While we are aware of the risk that behaviors like speeding and drunk driving pose, dialing a phone can be a danger, too: one study found that the odds of a crash or near-crash in newly-licensed teen drivers was more than 8 times greater when dialing a cell phone.[14] In our survey, we found that forty-two percent of teens say they have ridden with a teen driver who was speeding or driving recklessly, and 39 percent have been in the car with a teen driver who was texting. We heard from teens that 95 percent think other teens have ridden with drivers who were texting, showing just how widespread this issue is.

Given that parents are role models for their children, we asked teens what they've seen their parents do when riding with them. Almost six in 10 have ridden with a parent who was talking on the phone, 28 percent have been with a parent who was texting, and 17 percent say they have been in an crash that was another driver's fault.

Speaking up to an unsafe teen driver is a challenge for many in the survey; 40 percent of teens say they ask the driver to stop what they're doing, but another 39 percent say they do nothing (Figure 12). However, given that so many teens are reporting their parents' unsafe driving behaviors, it's worth asking: is it more difficult to ask a teen to stop texting while they're driving, or to ask a parent to stop being unsafe?

Figure 11: Have any of the following happened when you were riding as a passenger?

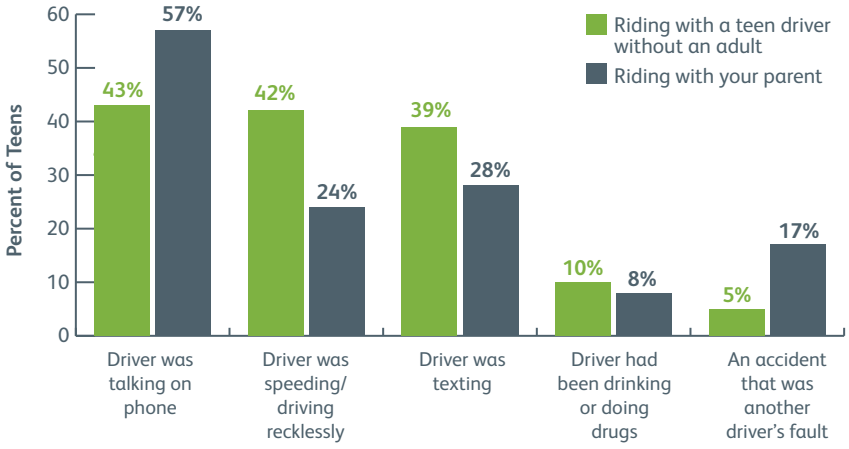
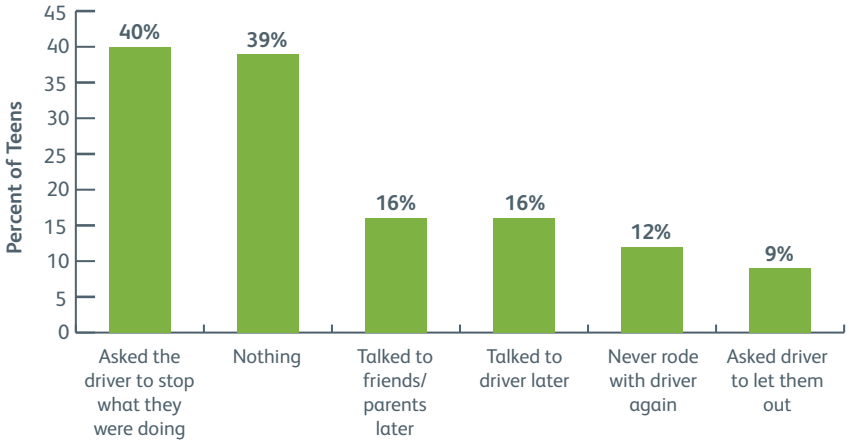


Figure 12: When faced with a teen driver who was behaving in a risky manner, four out of 10 teens asked a teen driver to stop—but another 39 percent did nothing.



EVER FELT UNSAFE WITH ANOTHER TEEN DRIVER?

"I didn't know if the driver was a reliable person. He seemed like a good guy, but I knew he had a bad/fun side to him with driving."



When faced with a teen driver who was behaving in a risky manner, four out of 10 teens asked a teen driver to stop—but another 39 percent did nothing.

How Public Policy Can Save Teen Lives

Public policy—smart laws, awareness about the law and practical, diligent enforcement—is successful in saving lives. From 1988 to 2010, the unintentional injury death rate declined by 55 percent for those under 19 and the motor vehicle related deaths have been reduced by 58 percent.[17] In that time, most states have passed laws that require drivers and passengers to wear seat belts and for parents to place their children in the correct car seats and booster seats up to specific ages, weights and/or heights. Laws governing how young drivers obtain driver's licenses can help drive down the number of fatalities and save lives.

Buckling up is important because unintentional injuries remain the leading killer of kids 19 and under, and road deaths contribute the greatest number to that quotient. As this report makes clear, the attitudes of teens towards driving are lax and the data is of concern. Seat belt use, the key focus of this report, is the first and perhaps most important reform to save young lives and is an important part of good graduated driver's license (GDL) laws. Safe Kids Worldwide supports public policy prescriptions to meet the challenge of teen driving.

The most effective approach is adopting and strengthening the system which eases young drivers into full driving privileges, most often in three phases. These are called "graduated driver's license" (GDL) systems. The phases govern the restrictions on young drivers as they climb the GDL ladder, most often the learner's permit stage, intermediate and full privileges.[15]

The following are key criteria, and why:

Limitation on Teen Driving	Common Sense Reason
At what age can a new driver "graduate" to the next phase?	Teens need time to develop good driving skills and habits.
Between what hours may he or she drive at night?	Night driving is proven to be more dangerous and difficult.
How many teen passengers can be in the car with a new driver?	Without an adult, licensed driver in the car, other teens can be a significant distraction.
Has the candidate violated motor vehicle laws, including seat belt use?	Knowing and adhering to laws—especially seat belt usage and zero tolerance to DWI—is critical.
May drivers text and use electronic devices?	As technology in the car is more prevalent, distraction becomes more and more risky.
How much education and supervised training?	The more practice and knowledge the better.

Adding tougher criteria to state GDL laws reduces the risk of crashes. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has developed an online calculator for how heightened GDL criteria can reduce crashes state by state. If Texas set the learner's permit age at 16 instead of 15, fatal crashes could be reduced by 13 percent. Research has found that GDL programs are associated with a 38 percent reduction in the rate of fatal crashes involving 16-year-old drivers.[16] IIHS says that giving all 50 states the strictest GDL law could save about 500 lives a year and prevent 9,500 crashes by 15 to 17 year olds.[18]

Public policy is best made backed by strong data. The night driving restriction demonstrates how data drives lifesaving policy making. A Massachusetts study showed that 45 percent of fatal crashes occur at night, while younger drivers are on the road at night 18 percent.[19] Thus, limitations on when a new driver can operate a motor vehicle are one of the most important provisions, at least limiting driving between 10pm and 6am, with exceptions for when there is a licensed, adult driver in the car. For example, if Ohio set the night driving curfew at 10:00 pm instead of midnight, fatal crashes could be reduced by 5 percent.

In addition to night driving curfews, the following are best practices for state GDL laws.

- Ban distractions—texting and use of distracting technology
- Limit number of teenage passengers
- Zero tolerance for alcohol use
- No violations of mandatory seat belt laws for the driver and passengers
- Learner's Permit stage starting no earlier than at age 16; full driving privileges at 18
- At least 50 hours of driver's education and adult-supervised driving

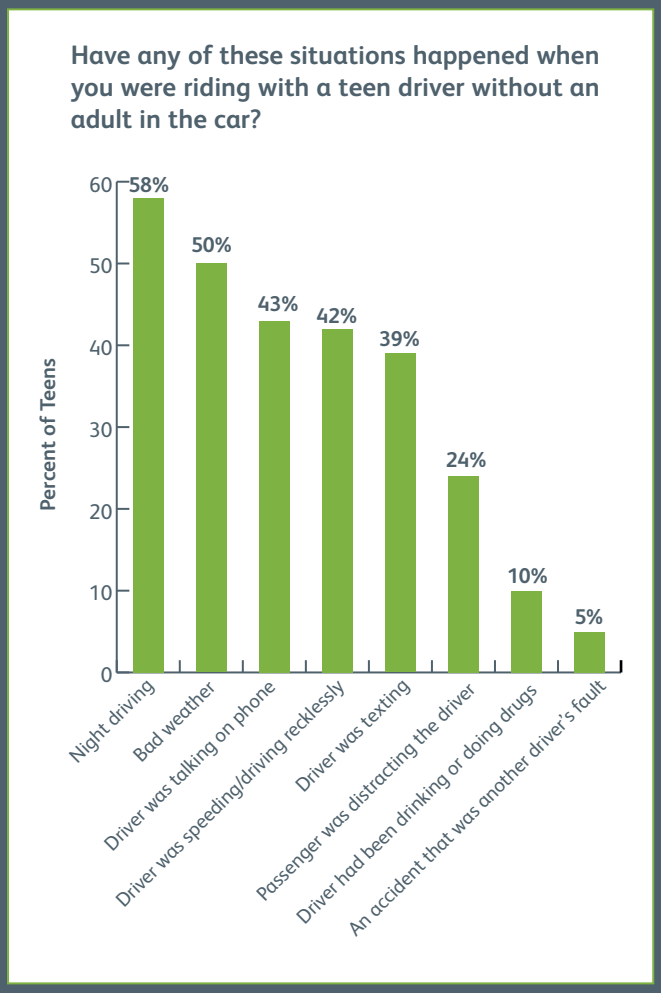
Further, violations of serious motor vehicle laws should be enforceable as a primary reason for a police officer to stop a car. Many states handcuff police from issuing a violation for seat belt usage, texting and other serious violations unless there's another violation such as speeding or running a red light.

MAP-21 Incentive Grant

In 2012, Congress "reauthorized" the law governing federal highway policy, MAP-21, and it recognized the effectiveness of GDL laws.[20] It created a grant program to help states enforce their GDL laws. The grants would be available to states which have enacted tough GDL laws based on specific criteria. However, the criteria in the law are stringent and no state has yet qualified for a grant. Moreover, there is little activity in state legislatures towards strengthening their laws. In fact, Iowa recently weakened its bill on teen passengers. Safe Kids Worldwide, Safe Kids Ohio and the National Safety Council are part of a coalition working for a tougher GDL law in that state relating to night driving curfews, but the new law, if passed, would not meet the grant criteria.[21]

Joined by more than 75 of its coalitions, Safe Kids is urging Congress to continue its work in encouraging states to pass stronger GDL laws by making the grant program effective.[22] That should include giving NHTSA the flexibility to approve waivers for states that have been diligent about passing strong GDL laws, with data-driven track records to justify their application.

What Teens Told Us	Law We Need
23 percent don't always wear a seat belt with teen drivers;	Primary enforcement seat belt laws for all passengers
81 percent think other teens are less likely to wear seat belts when not going far; 43 percent because they were in a hurry	
39 percent have been a passenger in car when a teen driver was texting	Primary enforcement technology bans, including texting and beyond
49 percent felt unsafe as a passenger in car driven by teen	Strong laws limiting teen passengers in cars, except when an adult, licensed driver is in the car
58 percent teens as passengers observed teen driver operating car at night, the greatest percentage among other risky behaviors	Strong law limiting the hours an intermediate driver can operate a motor vehicle





Strategies for Families

As a parent, it can feel impossible to know what teens are up to when riding with a teen driver. However, we learned that teens are faced with tough decisions and challenging situations as both passengers and drivers. Here are strategies for families to spark discussion and to make life-saving behavior changes.

Make using a seat belt for every ride a habit, starting when kids are young.

Teens whose parents don't use seat belts for every ride are less likely to buckle up themselves. And the top reason that teens gave for not buckling up was that they forgot or it wasn't a habit. Using a seat belt for every ride is one of the easiest ways to stay safe in a car; they're available in all cars, and wearing a seat belt lowers the risk of death for a front seat passenger by 45 percent.[12] Make sure that buckling up the whole family is a habit that begins at a young age.



Be a safety role model by observing speed limits, putting phones away while driving, and following the rules of the road.

Teens are aware when their parents aren't following the rules—28 percent say they've seen their parent texting while driving, the same behavior that every teen driver is told can lead to crashes. Even worse, these habits can lead to teens feeling unsafe when their parents are driving, such as the 31 percent of teens in our survey who reported not feeling safe when a parent was driving. Consider that you're a safety role model for your child or teenager—be an example for your kids, starting from when they are watching you from their car seats in the back seat.



Talk to teens and kids about ways to speak up if a driver of any age isn't driving safely.

It's never easy to be the one speaking out about unsafe behavior. But with 39 percent of teens doing nothing when confronted with an unsafe teen driver, it's important to give teens the confidence they need to speak up in these situations. Try giving them examples of situations in which they're riding with a driver who isn't safe—such as texting or speeding—and ask them what they would do. Then, tell them what some safe options would be, such as asking the driver to slow down or ask to be dropped off at a shopping center and call a parent to be picked up.



By engaging with these strategies, we hope that parents and teens can stay safe while riding in cars as both passengers and drivers.



Survey Methodology

Safe Kids Worldwide commissioned a national online survey of 1,051 teenagers ages 13 to 19. At least 150 surveys were completed by teens of each age (ex.: 13-year-olds). The survey had 38 questions and was fielded from February 18-26, 2014. The margin of error for the total sample size included in this study (n=1051) was 3.0 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. If recruited, managed and selected correctly, online samples can effectively reflect a known universe, however most online samples are not projectable because they are not true random samples of the population where every member of the population has a known and non-zero probability of selection.

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