

Novice drivers



- The crash risk for drivers is highest in the first 6-12 months of solo driving.
- Young adults (aged 17-24 years) are one of the most at-risk groups on the road. They are 2 ½ times more likely to be killed in a crash than any other age group.¹

State of the Road A Fact Sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q)

THE FACTS

This fact sheet complements CARRS-Q's Graduated Driver Licensing Fact Sheet.²

What is the difference between a "novice" and "young" driver or rider?

- For the purpose of this fact sheet, a young driver/rider is defined as aged 17-20 years; however traditionally in road safety research, young drivers/riders include those up to 25 years of age.
- Novice drivers/riders are "new to the road" (ie. they hold provisional licenses and are in their first years of solo driving or riding).
- Young novice drivers/riders therefore are young adults who are comparatively new to the experience of driving or riding on the road.

Young drivers/riders

- Young drivers/riders have a disproportionately high rate of involvement in road crashes.³ Their significantly higher crash and fatality rates are found not only across Australia, but around the world. Whilst crash rates have steadily declined over recent decades, young drivers and riders continue to be killed at rates that far exceed those of older, more experienced drivers/riders.⁴
- For young drivers/riders in Queensland in 2010:⁵
 - 14.6% of the licensed driver/rider population was aged 17-24 years;
 - One in five persons killed on the road were aged 17-24 years;
 - 58% of drivers aged 17-24 years were killed in a single-vehicle crash;
 - 79% of these drivers were male;

- 85.7% of young adult road users were judged to be at fault in the crash; and
- One in four of all fatalities arose from crashes involving young drivers or motorcycle riders.
- Each fatal car crash has been estimated to cost more than AUD\$2.2 million, with casualty crashes costing more than AUD\$500,000 each.⁶
- Research has also shown that for each young driver fatally injured in a crash, another 1.3 persons (their passengers or other road users) are also killed.⁷

Novice drivers/riders

- Novice drivers are especially over-represented in single-vehicle crashes and those crashes involving:
 - Running into the back of another vehicle;
 - Turning right at intersections; and
 - Running off the road or losing control of their vehicle, particularly on a curve.
- In Queensland in 2011:⁸
 - 5.6% of the driving population had a provisional driving licence; and
 - One in 10 drivers/riders killed had a provisional driving licence.
- In Queensland, between 1 January 2000 and 1 December 2009⁵, there were 94,598 crashes involving a young driver aged 16-24 years. Of these crashes:
 - more than half (58%) resulted in an injury or a fatality; and
 - two thirds (63.8%) involved a male driver.

Why are novice and young drivers/riders at risk?

- There are some characteristics of novice and young drivers/riders that place them at higher risk of a road crash. These include:
 - Young drivers/riders are still developing their psychomotor, visual perception and hazard perception skills associated with driving and riding. This inexperience places all young novice drivers/riders at risk on the road.
 - Young novice drivers/riders tend to overestimate their driving skills and abilities, whilst under-estimating risks and hazards associated with the road environment and their driving behaviour.
 - Young novice drivers frequently drive older cars with fewer safety features. Some young drivers do not use the safety features in the car, such as seatbelts, and this places them at far greater risk of harm in a crash.

The most effective long term method to reduce a young person's crash risk is to gain more on-road driving experience.



- Particular personal characteristics can place young novice drivers/riders at higher risk of a road crash. These include:
 - Their age and gender – younger and male novice drivers/riders are at higher risk than older and female ones.
 - Young novice drivers/riders are also adolescents, and this period is associated with increased risk-taking behaviour and increased vulnerability to negative peer influences. Undertaking risky behaviour and showing off to friends who are often their passengers is very risky not only for the young novice driver, but also for their passengers and other road users around them.
 - Young novice drivers/riders are also more likely to drive because they experience - or want to experience - strong emotions like excitement and anger.
- Furthermore, there are lifestyle characteristics that increase the crash risk of young novice drivers/riders. These include:
 - Young novice drivers can be distracted from concentrating on their driving by their passengers, their mobile telephone, and other devices in the car itself such as the stereo and GPS devices.
 - Young novice drivers/riders tend to travel at high risk times, particularly at night and on the weekend (e.g. 'high alcohol hours'). They are also more likely to carry passengers at these times.
 - Young novice drivers/riders tend to lead very busy lives, often juggling study and work with family commitments and time with friends. This can mean they are driving when they are very tired or after alcohol or drug consumption.
 - Young novice drivers who speed have less time to safely avoid hazards on the road.

How can young driver/riders safety be improved?

- A popular misconception about the causes of young and novice driver and rider crashes is that they primarily arise from inadequate driving skills, and that better-educated and trained drivers and riders have reduced crash risks. However, the evidence indicates that it is primarily inexperienced/underdeveloped driving-hazard perception skills and risk-taking behaviour that contributes to the higher crash involvement of young drivers.
- As a result, the most effective long term method to reduce a young person's crash risk is to gain more on-road driving experience. It has been estimated that it takes young drivers and motorbike riders approximately three to five years to develop a full complement of driving skills.
- Increased driving experience leads to a reduction in crash risk by closing the gap between a driver's/riders' real ability and their perceptions about their ability, and helps them to estimate and adapt to risk more quickly and appropriately.
- International research has shown that the implementation of graduated driver licensing (GDL) for young novice drivers has been an effective strategy for reducing the crash involvement of this group: evidence for specialised driver training programs tends to show they are ineffective and may increase exposure (through younger licensing)⁹ and risk taking (through overconfidence).¹⁰ While GDL programs vary around the world, they typically involve three levels of licence - Learner, intermediate (Provisional) and unrestricted (Open) - with minimum durations, varying restrictions and driving privileges at each level. For some GDL programs, in addition to a practical driving assessment at the end of the Learner period, the novice driver must successfully complete other tests to progress through the licence levels, e.g. the hazard perception test in Queensland.

- Although young people are inexperienced when it comes to driving on the road, we should not accept that this inevitably leads to an increased involvement in crashes.

Underdeveloped hazard perception skills and risk-taking behaviour contributes to the higher crash involvement of young drivers.

Recent changes in young novice driver legislation¹¹

Driver licensing systems vary between Australian States and Territories. In July 2007, the Queensland Government introduced a new graduated licensing system to reduce road fatalities, particularly among young motorists. The changes included:

- The Learner licensing age was lowered to 16 years and this licence must be held for a minimum of 12 months.
- There is a mandatory requirement for Learner drivers under 25 years of age to gain 100 hours of certified, supervised driving experience, recorded in a log book. Learners can obtain three hours of logbook credit for one hour of practice with a professional driving instructor, up to a maximum of 30 hours of credit.
- A two-phased P1 and P2 Provisional licence system has been introduced.
- P1 Provisional licenses must be held for a minimum of 12 months, and P2 for a minimum of two years, if you are less than 23 years old.
- Drivers must pass a hazard perception test to progress from a P1 to a P2 licence.
- Provisional licence holders (P1 or P2) must not accumulate more than 4 demerit points in a one-year period.
- P1 drivers cannot carry more than one passenger aged under 21 years between 11pm and 5am (excluding immediate family members).
- Displaying L-plates (a black L on a yellow background) and P-plates (a red P for P1 and a green P for P2, both on a white background) are now compulsory.
- Mobile phone use, including hands-free, blue-tooth accessories and loud-speaker functions, is restricted for young novice drivers aged less than 25 years with a learner or provisional (P1 or P2) licence.
- Mobile loud speaker functions have been restricted for supervisors and passengers of learner and P1 licence holders under 25 while they are driving.
- Novice drivers must have a .00 blood alcohol concentration.
- Motorbike learners are required to hold a car provisional licence for 12 months before obtaining a learner licence.

- Restrictions such as ‘no late driving’ (between 11pm and 5am) for one year have been introduced for young novice drivers who have accrued excessive demerit points or have committed a high speed driving offence.
- Provisional licence holders under 25 years old must not drive a high-powered vehicle (see Queensland Transport and Main Roads webpages for definitions of ‘high- powered’)

These changes in the graduated licensing system recognise the importance of a less-risky on-road driving experience for novice drivers/riders while they develop safer driving habits. The changes to the Queensland GDL program have resulted in learner drivers undertaking significantly more supervised driving practice.¹² A more extensive evaluation of the enhanced GDL program in Queensland is currently underway.

TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE

Novice drivers are particularly vulnerable in their first years of driving. Safety tips include:

- **Follow the road rules.**
- **Drive to the conditions.** If it is raining or traffic is heavy, slow down and allow extra space.
- **Stay attentive.** Road and traffic conditions can change within seconds. Remain alert at all times.
- **Avoiding driving with groups of friends.** It may lead to distraction or the temptation to show off.
- **Resist peer pressure** to take risks. Drivers are responsible not just for themselves, but also for their passengers and other road users.
- **Avoid distractions** whilst driving such as loud music, noisy passengers or interaction with electronic devices. Advise passengers if their behaviour is distracting.
- **Do not use a mobile phone** whilst driving either to answer or make calls, or receive or send texts. Put phones and devices out of reach in the backseat or in the boot to avoid the temptation to use them.
- **Do not consume alcohol or drugs** if driving. Remember that alcohol and drugs, including prescription medications, can affect driving for several hours. If taking prescription or over-the-counter medication, speak to your doctor or pharmacist about whether it’s safe to drive.
- If you do intend to consume alcohol or drugs, **plan ahead** to use a designated driver, public transport or to stay overnight.
- **Do not speed** - Resist time pressure by allowing plenty of time to reach your destination.
- **Maintain a safe distance** between your car and the one in front. Many crashes occur due to following too closely. Maintaining a safe gap allows you time to react to unexpected situations.
- **Wear your seat belt.**



- **Avoid driving if you are tired or feeling unwell** and **take regular breaks.** If you do feel sleepy, stop the car.
- **Avoid driving late at night.** If you must drive at this time, be especially careful.
- **Scan ahead.** Many crashes occur because drivers only watch the car in front. Always scan ahead and around the car to anticipate potential dangers.
- **Be aware of blind spots** associated with your vehicle.
- **Plan an escape route.** If you encounter a potentially dangerous situation, try to analyse what others are doing and what the outcome might be and allow yourself space to react.
- **Maintain your car** with regular maintenance.
- **Plan your route** so you can confidently navigate to your destination.

Do not text or make mobile phone calls whilst driving.

CARRS-Q'S WORK IN THIS AREA

CARRS-Q has been and continues to be a leader within the domain of road safety for young and novice drivers. Some of our research has focussed on:

- Factors influencing learner driver experiences.¹³
- The experiences of learner drivers, provisional drivers and supervisors with graduated driver licensing in two Australian jurisdictions.¹⁴
- A comprehensive investigation of the risky driving behaviour of young novice drivers.¹⁵
- The development, trial and evaluation of a peer-based intervention to prevent risk-taking in adolescents.
- Skills for Preventing Injury in Youth (SPIY) school-based first aid and peer protection program.¹⁶ This program has now been run with a number of schools in Queensland and the ACT. Evaluation is ongoing and the

program is being modified for use with specific target groups (e.g. high risk youth).

- Development of a resource kit for the Learner Driver Mentor Program.
- Provision of advice on safer driving agreements.
- Reducing optimism bias in young novice drivers: The potential of accountability or insight experience interventions.
- Queensland longitudinal study of risk- taking behaviours.
- Review of the ACT Road Ready pre-licence driver education program.
- Outcome evaluation of the ACT Road Ready pre-license driver education program.
- Investigation of third party parental policing of young driver compliance with the restrictions of GDL in Queensland and in the ACT.
- Risky gadgets to the rescue: Designing personal ubicomp devices to foster safer driving behaviours in young males.
- A comprehensive investigation of road safety advertisements persuasiveness for young drivers.
- Sleepiness and other driving risks in young adults.
- Enforcement during the provisional licence phase in graduated driver licensing.
- An in-depth examination of crashes involving young drivers.
- Evaluation of the “Braking the Cycle” intervention to assist disadvantaged youth to meet learner driver requirements.
- Improving passenger safety among youth: A web-based strategy.

Resist passenger distraction and peer pressure to take risks.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

On the 11th of May, 2011, the United Nations launched the Decade of Action for Road Safety, 2011-2020¹⁷. In response, governments from more than 70 countries committed to improving road safety not only locally, but on a global scale. In Australia, the 2011-2020 National Road Safety Strategy¹⁸ has been established.

The Strategy:

- Aims to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on Australian roads by at least 30%.
- Is based on the Safe System principles of (1) safe roads, (2) safe speeds, (3) safe vehicles, (4) safe people.

- For young and novice drivers:
 - *safe roads* means road safety improvements through infrastructure investment;
 - *safe speeds* means speed limits that balance safety with mobility needs, and greater compliance with speed limits by all drivers;
 - *safe vehicles* means continued improvement in vehicle safety; and
 - *safe people* means continued improvement in graduated driver licensing and road safety education programs.
- The progress of the National Road Safety Strategy¹⁸ will be evaluated on an ongoing basis, and a report summarising the steps taken and the associated outcomes was released in 2013.¹⁹
- Recent changes in the Queensland graduated licensing program focus on encouraging increased supervised practise. Monitoring and evaluation of this will shape future research and interventions to improve novice driver safety.

We should not accept that inexperience makes young driver crashes inevitable.

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