

Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

1 What is graduated driver licensing?

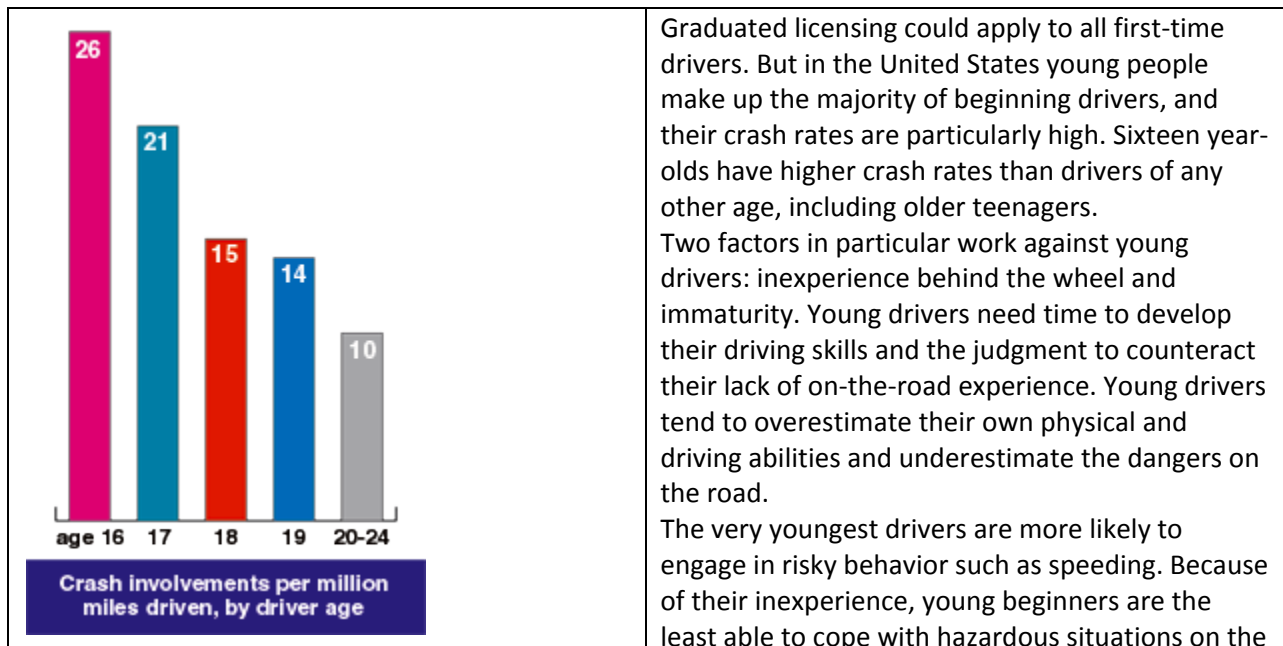
It's a system designed to phase in young beginners to full driving privileges as they become more mature and develop their driving skills. Versions of graduated licensing are in effect in New Zealand; Victoria, Australia; and several Canadian provinces. Beginning with Florida in 1996, graduated licensing systems also have been adopted in most U.S. states.

There are 3 stages to a graduated system: a supervised learner's period; an intermediate license (after passing the driver test) that limits driving in high-risk situations except under supervision; and then a license with full privileges, available after completing the first 2 stages.

The best systems include a learner's stage beginning at age 16 and lasting at least 6 months, 30 or more hours of supervised driving, plus restrictions on unsupervised night driving and passengers during the first 6 to 12 months of licensure. The nighttime driving restriction should start at 9 or 10 p.m., and no more than 1 teen passenger should be allowed any time of day.

No state law meets or exceeds all of these requirements, but most states do impose some of the core requirements. Some states add other requirements including belt use provisions, cellphone use restrictions, penalty systems so that violations result in license suspension or extension of the holding period, and driver education.

2 Why target young people? Why not target all novice drivers?



	<p>road. The presence of passengers can increase the risk by distracting beginning drivers and creating peer pressure to participate in risky behavior. Teenage passengers increase the crash risk for teen drivers during the day as well as at night.¹ Graduated licensing doesn't attempt to modify driver behavior directly. Instead, it introduces beginners to driving in a low-risk manner, protecting both them and others on the road while they learn to drive and become more mature. It should be noted that young people are subject to legal restrictions in a variety of areas that include voting, purchasing alcohol, serving in the military, and assuming financial obligations</p>
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3 Isn't it unfair to restrict all teenagers' driving privileges? Why not just penalize the problem drivers?

We know some of the characteristics of younger drivers who are more likely to get into crashes, but it's impossible to identify such drivers adequately and intervene before they crash. The licensing systems in many states impose greater and/or earlier penalties on young people for traffic violations than they do on older drivers, but most fatally injured young drivers don't have prior traffic violations or crashes on their records.

The logic of addressing all young people is that they all are beginning drivers. They all need time to develop driving skills in low-risk settings.

4 Has graduated licensing reduced crashes?

Yes. Sound research indicates positive effects on the crash experience of young drivers in the United States and other countries including Canada and New Zealand. In US states that have adopted elements of graduated licensing, studies have found crash reductions of about 10-30 percent.^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8} A national evaluation reported that states with 3-stage graduated systems had 11 percent fewer fatal crashes per population of 16 year-olds during 1994-2004 than states without such systems.^{9,10} Another national evaluation studied the relationship between teenage crash fatalities during 1992-2002 and the strength of graduated licensing laws, based on criteria developed by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Reported reductions in 15-17-year-old crash deaths were found from having a 3-stage system. Laws considered good resulted in larger reductions than those rated fair or marginal.¹¹

5 What are nighttime driving restrictions?

These are different from curfews, which are viewed as a means to get young people off the streets and into their homes at a set time. Communities often adopt curfews to reduce behavior that's criminal or mischievous, but the purpose of nighttime restrictions on driving is to protect young beginners by

keeping them from driving unsupervised during the high-risk nighttime hours.

6 Are nighttime restrictions critical components of graduated licensing?

Yes. Four of every 10 deaths of teens in motor vehicles occur between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. Studies show nighttime driving restrictions typically are associated with crash reductions of 40 to 60 percent during the restricted hours.^{3,4,6,12}

7 How early should nighttime driving restrictions begin?

Almost two-thirds of all fatal nighttime crashes involving 16 year-olds occur before midnight. This is when more young people are on the road, so driving restrictions for young beginners should start several hours before midnight.

8 Are passenger restrictions important?

They're essential components of graduated licensing. Crash risk for teenage drivers increases incrementally with 1, 2, or 3 or more passengers. With 3 or more, fatal crash risk is about 3 times higher than when a beginner is driving alone.¹

The presence of passengers is a major contributor to the teenage death toll.^{13,14} About two-thirds of all crash deaths of teens that involve 16-year-old drivers occur when the beginners were driving with teen passengers. Studies indicate that passenger restrictions can reduce this problem.^{15,16,17,18}

9 What guarantees that beginners will get more supervised driving under graduated licensing?

Requiring longer learner's permit periods (at least 6 months) provides more time for beginners to practice driving under the supervision of adults. Many states require parents to certify that their children have acquired a minimum amount of practice time, typically 50 hours. A survey conducted in Michigan indicates that parents are very positive about the 50-hour requirement. These parents reported an average of 75 hours of supervised driving.¹⁹

10 Do parents support graduated licensing?

Yes, parents strongly favor it. Parents of teenagers surveyed in 1996 in Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York said they strongly support graduated licensing.^{20,21} An Insurance Institute for Highway Safety survey of parents of young drivers in California who had gone through the graduated licensing process found 95 percent of the parents supported a 6-month period of supervised driving. Ninety-four percent favored night driving restrictions, 84 percent favored restricting teenage passengers during the first 6 months, and 79 percent of the parents said they favor a licensing system that includes all of these components. The survey was conducted in 2000.²² Parents of teenagers and other adults

were interviewed in Connecticut in 2008 when new graduated licensing laws were being considered. The majority supported an increase in required practice driving hours, a longer permit period, a longer-term passenger restriction, and a nighttime driving restriction starting earlier than midnight.²³

11 Are teenagers who are subject to graduated licensing restrictions allowed to drive to school, work, and their extracurricular activities?

Yes. States can and do allow waivers so teenagers may drive during restricted hours to work or to attend school activities. An important factor in the crashes that occur at night is the combination of more difficult driving conditions and distractions caused by teenage passengers. Young people driving to work are unlikely to have teen passengers.

Graduated licensing does delay full licensure, but studies indicate it doesn't significantly hinder social activities. Sixteen year-olds have largely similar lifestyles in terms of social, dating, and work patterns, whether they live in states where many, some, or few 16 year-olds are licensed.²⁴ Another concern is the administrative burden on states that have to issue many waivers. Maryland examined this when it implemented a nighttime driving restriction and found it wasn't a problem.

12 Can driver education reduce the need for graduated licensing?

No. Driver education hasn't been shown to reduce subsequent crash rates among beginning drivers. A good education course, emphasizing on-the-road driving, can teach basic vehicle control skills. But if driver education is offered or required in a state or community, it needs to be in the framework of an effective graduated licensing system to reduce crashes.

More important is that completion of driver education shouldn't reduce the time a beginner is restricted under a graduated system. No amount of driver education will take the place of actual experience behind the wheel under controlled conditions.^{25,26}

References