

Issue Brief

A Promising Future for Kentucky's Teen Drivers

Motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of death among teenagers in the United States.¹ Nationwide, states have been taking action to reduce that death rate through the passage of Graduated Driver's Licensing (GDL) legislation.

Crash data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration shows that young drivers face a significantly higher risk of crashing than drivers with experience.² GDL laws focus on that fact and aim to ease young drivers into the driving process. As of January 2006, 44 states (including all states bordering Kentucky) and the District of Columbia had GDL laws with the critical intermediate stage.³

The results of passing Graduated Driver's License laws are significant. In Wisconsin, nighttime fatal crashes involving teen drivers declined 25 percent. In Oregon, there was a 33 percent drop in fatal and serious crashes involving 16-year-olds. In Michigan, crash rates among 16-year-olds declined 25 percent.

During the 2006 legislative session, Kentucky lawmakers passed similar legislation, creating a three-tier Graduated Driver's Licensing system with the following components:

Permit stage

- Youth may obtain a permit at the age of 16 after passing a written knowledge test and vision test.
- *Permit drivers must have a licensed driver age 21 or older in the front passenger seat of the vehicle.
- Young drivers must keep the permit for at least six months.
- Driving is prohibited from midnight to 6 am for drivers under the age of 18.

* Intermediate stage

- Young drivers may apply for an intermediate license after they have had their permit for six months without a moving traffic violation.
- Teens with an intermediate license are allowed to drive without an adult.
- An intermediate license prohibits driving between midnight and 6 am and limits teen passengers to one unrelated person under the age of 20.
- Teen drivers must also complete a 4-hour driver's training and highway safety program given either by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, an approved private driving school, or their high school driver's education course before getting a full operator's license.

Full Operator's License

- After completing the 6-month intermediate stage, teens may apply for a full operator's license.
- Teens are granted full privileges of an operator's license.

* Indicates new part of the law.

The changes made to the permit stage during the 2006 legislative session will take effect on October 1, 2006. The new intermediate stage will take effect April 1, 2007.

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Authors

Tara Grieshop-Goodwin
tgrieshop@kyyouth.org

Ashley Mann
amann@kyyouth.org

Sarah Trainor
strainor@kyyouth.org

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KENTUCKY YOUTH ADVOCATES

11001 Bluegrass Pkwy., Suite 100
Jeffersontown, KY 40299
(502) 895-8167

www.kyyouth.org

Safe driving requires a team effort by both parents and teens. State licensing laws and education manuals are only the beginning. Below is a list of helpful strategies for your team to encourage safe driving.

Strategies for teens:

- Ask your parents to help you get driving practice in different driving conditions.
- Limit the number of passengers you carry.
- If you are driving, ask your friends to let you concentrate and return the courtesy when riding with your friends.
- Always wear your seatbelt. As of July 12, 2006 you can get pulled over if you or a passenger is not wearing a seat belt.
- Never drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Visit the *Road Ready Street Wise* video game and *Road Ready Teens* website at www.roadreadyteens.org.

Strategies for parents:

- Read up on the components of Kentucky’s GDL law at the following link: <http://drlic.kytc.ky.gov/Grad/>.
- Implement your own rules about cell phone use while driving.
- Talk to your child about the responsibilities that come with driving.
- Be a good role model for your teen behind the wheel.
- Be smart when choosing the right vehicle for your teen driver.
- Visit the *Road Ready Teens* website for tips for parents of young drivers at www.roadreadyteens.org.

Endnotes

- 1 Subramanian, R. (2006). “Motor Vehicle Traffic Crashes as a Leading Cause of Death in the United States, 2003” Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note. Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- 2 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (2006). “Graduated Driver Licensing System” Traffic Safety Facts: Research Note. Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- 3 Ibid.