

# YOUNG DRIVERS

## Information Fact Sheet

The initial years as a car driver are important for building up the driving experience necessary to reduce the risk of crashes.

This fact sheet highlights when crashes involving young drivers are most likely to occur and then examines the underlying causes associated with these crashes.

The majority of road crashes involving young people occur over the weekend, in the late afternoon and night. When young drivers are involved in crashes, they are more often single-vehicle crashes. Young drivers are also over-represented in head-on, overtaking and rear-end crashes.

Young people often engage in risk taking behaviour. On the road, this can be manifested in driving behaviours such as high speeds, close following distances, failing to comply with red signals and aggressive interactions with other road users.

**Research has shown that the underlying causes of road crashes and fatalities for young people are:**

- Inexperience
- Alcohol
- Overconfidence
- Poor hazard perception
- Unlicensed driving
- Location – notably rural areas
- Risk taking behaviour
- Carrying passengers/passenger behaviour

### UNDEVELOPED SKILLS

Young drivers have less developed cognitive, psychomotor and perceptual skills associated with driving than more experienced drivers.

Cognitive skills include vital abilities such as decision-making and personal risk assessment. Psychomotor skills are used to handle and manoeuvre the vehicle, eg. steering, braking etc. Perceptual skills involve the ability to detect all aspects of the driving environment.

### THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S CRASH INVOLVEMENT

In addition to the underdeveloped skills typical of young drivers, the following have also been shown to contribute to their crash involvement.

#### BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS

##### Speeding

Some young drivers can mistakenly believe they are sufficiently skilled to control the vehicle at high speeds. Some see speeding as socially acceptable and are more likely to speed in their local area.

##### Drink Driving

For young drivers the risks are greater because of their inexperience both with drinking alcohol and driving. They are more affected by alcohol and experience an increased risk of crashing even with lower blood alcohol content (BAC).

##### Carrying Passengers

There is an increased risk of crashing when young drivers carry passengers, in particular their friends, in their vehicle.

##### No Seatbelt

Some young drivers don't wear seat belts, which is related to other risks such as poor vehicle condition, drink-driving and carrying more than the legally allowed number of passengers.

## Stress

Experiencing a stressful situation prior to driving has been associated with crashes involving young people. Novice drivers can also be easily stressed in emergencies and may over-react or panic.

## Fatigue

Young drivers may drive when they are fatigued, which can be associated with lifestyle patterns such as driving late at night, and combining study and work.

## ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

### Dangerous Conditions

Young drivers often drive under more dangerous conditions, such as night-time and twilight. They tend to drive older vehicles which have less safety features.

### Rural Areas

Crash risk is higher amongst young drivers in rural areas. This is possibly due to factors such as a lack of alternative transport, greater travelling distances and higher speed limits on rural roads.

## THE GRADUATED LICENSING SCHEME (GLS)

In July 2007, the NSW Government introduced a new range of changes to the Graduated Licensing Scheme aimed at giving young people more driving experience prior to gaining their Provisional Licence (P1). Learner drivers must now need to hold their learners licence for a minimum of 12 months, completing 120 hours of supervised driving including 20 hours of night driving.

### Other changes introduced are :

- Zero tolerance for speeding
- Peer passenger restrictions for P1 drivers
- A ban on ALL mobile phone use
- Changes to the display of L and P plates on vehicles

These new changes bring a range of new penalties. **For further information go to [www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)**

### THE FOUR TESTS ARE:

- 1 The computer-based Driver Knowledge Test (DKT) which must be passed before obtaining a learner licence.
- 2 The Driving Ability Road Test (DART) which must be passed before graduating to a provisional P1 licence.
- 3 The Hazard Perception Test (HPT) which must be passed before graduating to a provisional P2 licence.
- 4 The Driver Qualification Test (DQT) which must be passed before graduating to an unrestricted licence.

New drivers in NSW will now have at least 36 months of experience (42 months minimum for drivers who are under 25 years of age when they obtain their learner licences) and will have passed four tests before finally graduating to a full licence.

The GLS uses the latest technology to assess the competence of new drivers. Extensive experience under various conditions is compulsory and the novice driver period has been extended to more than double the previous minimum duration. This ensures greater opportunity of training and experience under controlled conditions.

In addition to the knowledge test, learner drivers have to gain experience under various traffic conditions. This experience must be recorded in a logbook and be signed off by the learner's supervisor (usually a parent). This progression through the licensing stages means that new drivers will now be at least 20 years of age before obtaining an unrestricted licence, whereas previously drivers could hold an unrestricted licence at the age of 18.

### KEY FACTS

- Drivers 17 to 25 hold 16% of licences.
- Deaths due to road crashes are higher in the 15-24 year age group than any other age group.
- Statistics show that young drivers aged 17-20 years are 3 times more likely than drivers aged 21-plus years to be involved in a serious crash.
- Amongst young drivers, males, compared to females, are significantly over-represented in road crashes.

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