



# Traffic Safety Facts 2001

## Young Drivers



### A Public Information Fact Sheet on Motor Vehicle and Traffic Safety Published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's National Center for Statistics and Analysis

There were 190.6 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2000 (2001 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.8 percent (12.9 million) of the total, a 3.2 percent increase from the 12.5 million young drivers in 1990.

In 2001, 8,137 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes — a 1 percent decrease from the 8,220 involved in 1991. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 1 percent between 1991 and 2001. For young males, driver fatalities dropped by 3 percent, compared with a 15 percent increase for young females (Table 1).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 1998 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 2001, 3,608 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 337,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

**“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people from 15 to 20 years old.”**

**Figure 1. Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old, 1991-2001**

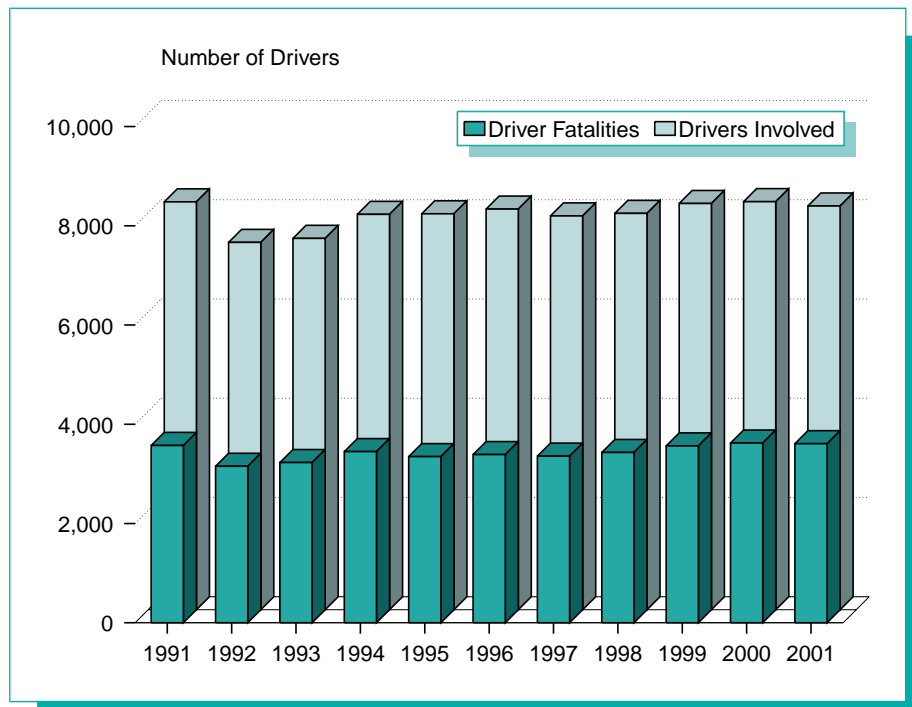


Table 1. Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Fatal Crashes, 1991 and 2001

	1991			2001			Percentage Change, 1991-2001		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Number		Percentage Age 15-20
							Total	Age 15-20	
<i>Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes</i>									
Total	54,391	8,220	15.1	57,480	8,137	14.2	+6%	-1%	-6%
Male	40,731	6,103	15.0	41,711	5,766	13.8	+2%	-6%	-8%
Female	12,825	2,117	16.5	14,867	2,371	15.9	+16%	+12%	-4%
<i>Driver Fatalities</i>									
Total	23,930	3,573	14.9	25,840	3,608	14.0	+8%	+1%	-6%
Male	18,125	2,703	14.9	19,184	2,611	13.6	+6%	-3%	-9%
Female	5,805	870	15.0	6,617	997	15.1	+14%	+15%	+1%

In 2001, 14 percent (8,137) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (57,480) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 17 percent (1,862,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,173,000) were young drivers.

**“In 2001, 14 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”**

Table 2. Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes and Driver Involvement Rates by Age Group, 2001

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
2000 Population (Percent)*	8.6	5.3	14.2	16.0	13.4	8.6	3.4	9.0
Drivers Involved in 2001 Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	18.5	12.8	21.5	18.8	12.7	7.1	2.2	5.9
Multi-Vehicle	12.3	9.2	20.4	20.2	15.7	9.2	3.0	9.8
All Fatal Crashes	14.6	10.5	20.8	19.7	14.6	8.4	2.7	8.4
2000 Licensed Drivers* (Percent)	6.8	6.7	19.3	22.1	18.9	11.9	4.4	9.9
Drivers Involved in 2000 Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	63.8	46.4	32.0	26.4	22.9	21.0	18.5	25.0

\* 2001 data not available.

In 2001, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old was \$42.3 billion.

More than one-third (397) of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had an invalid operator’s license at the time of the crash also had a previous license suspension or revocation (Table 3). For the same age group, 31 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2001 had been drinking (Table 4).

**Table 3. Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 2001**

Driving Record	License Status					
	Valid (6,855)		Invalid (1,205)		Total (8,137)*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,203	18.6	141	13.9	1,344	18.0
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	543	7.9	397	37.2	940	11.9
Previous DWI Convictions	95	1.4	71	6.6	166	2.1
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,688	24.7	182	17.0	1,870	23.6
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	1,335	19.5	214	20.0	1,549	19.6

\*Includes 77 drivers with unknown license status.

### Motorcycles

During 2001, 242 young motorcycle drivers (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 7,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 29 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 674 motorcyclists of all ages in 2001, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 444 lives could have been saved.

During 2001, 50 percent of the motorcycle drivers between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2001, nearly one-half (44 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

### Alcohol

*In 2001, NHTSA began using a revised method — **multiple imputation** — to estimate missing information about blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels for persons involved in fatal crashes. The alcohol estimates in this fact sheet are based on the new imputation method. More information on the new multiple imputation method, including detailed tabulations of alcohol involvement in various categories (age, sex, time of day, etc.), is available in NHTSA Technical Report DOT HS 809 403, Transitioning to Multiple Imputation: A New Method to Estimate Missing Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) Values in FARS.*

NHTSA defines a fatal traffic crash as being *alcohol-related* if either a driver or a nonoccupant (e.g., pedestrian) had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.01 grams per deciliter (g/dl) or greater in a police-reported traffic crash. Persons with a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or greater involved in fatal crashes are considered to be *intoxicated*. This is the legal limit of intoxication in most states.

**“During 2001, 242 motorcycle drivers 15-20 years old were killed and an additional 7,000 were injured.”**

In 2001, 25 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.

**Table 4. Alcohol Involvement Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2001**

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01-0.07 g/dl	≥0.08 g/dl
Surviving	4,529	83	5	12
Fatally Injured	3,608	69	6	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,137</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>

**Table 5. Intoxication Rates Among Young Drivers Fatally Injured in Traffic Crashes by Age, 2001**

Age (Years)	Number of Drivers	Percentage Intoxicated (BAC ≥0.08 g/dl)
15	79	17
16	455	10
17	583	16
18	807	24
19	867	30
20	817	35

***“In 2001, 25 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.”***

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 2001, 3 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 5 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 23 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

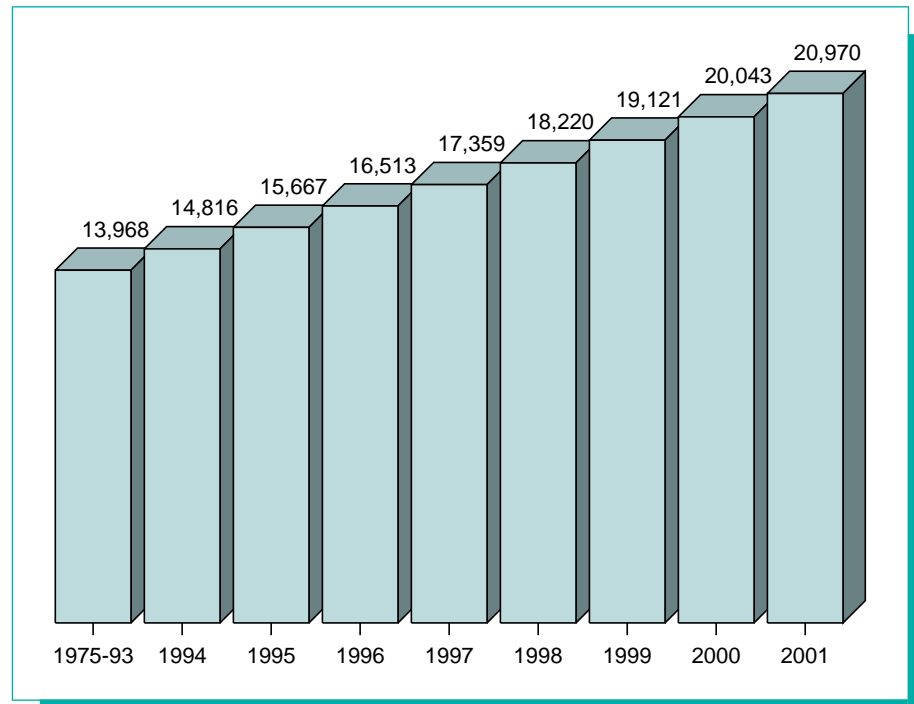
The numbers of drivers 15 to 20 years old involved in fatal crashes who were intoxicated dropped by 24 percent between 1991 and 2001.

For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 2001, 27 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 13 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2001, 70 percent of the young drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 79 percent were unrestrained.

All states and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. NHTSA estimates that these laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 20,970 lives since 1975. In 2001, an estimated 927 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws. Twenty states and the District of Columbia have set 0.08 g/dl as the legal intoxication limit, and all states plus the District of Columbia have zero tolerance laws for drivers under the age of 21 (it is illegal for drivers under 21 to drive with BAC levels of 0.02 g/dl or greater).

**Figure 2. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2001**



**“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 20,970 lives since 1975.”**

**For more information:**

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NPO-121, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. NCSA information can also be obtained by telephone or by fax-on-demand at 1-800-934-8517. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/nca>. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.

Other fact sheets available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis are *Overview, Alcohol, Occupant Protection, Older Population, Speeding, Children, Pedestrians, Pedalcyclists, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, School Transportation-Related Crashes, State Traffic Data, and State Alcohol Estimates*. Detailed data on motor vehicle traffic crashes are published annually in *Traffic Safety Facts: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System*.