Traffic Safety Facts 1995

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Young Drivers

People Saving People
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov

There were 177.4 million licensed drivers in the United States in 1995. Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.7 percent (11.9 million) of the total, an 11 percent decrease from the 13.4 million young drivers in 1985.

In 1995, 7,993 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes—a 17 percent decrease from the 9,659 involved in 1985. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 22 percent between 1985 and 1995.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 1992 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 1995, a total of 6,220 persons 15 to 20 years old were killed in traffic crashes, of which 3,351 were drivers. An additional 361,000 15- to 20-year-old drivers were injured in motor vehicle crashes.

"For people from 15 to 20 years old, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death."

In 1995, 14 percent (7,993) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (56,155) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 17 percent (2,030,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,782,000) were young drivers.

Figure 1. Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old, 1985-1995

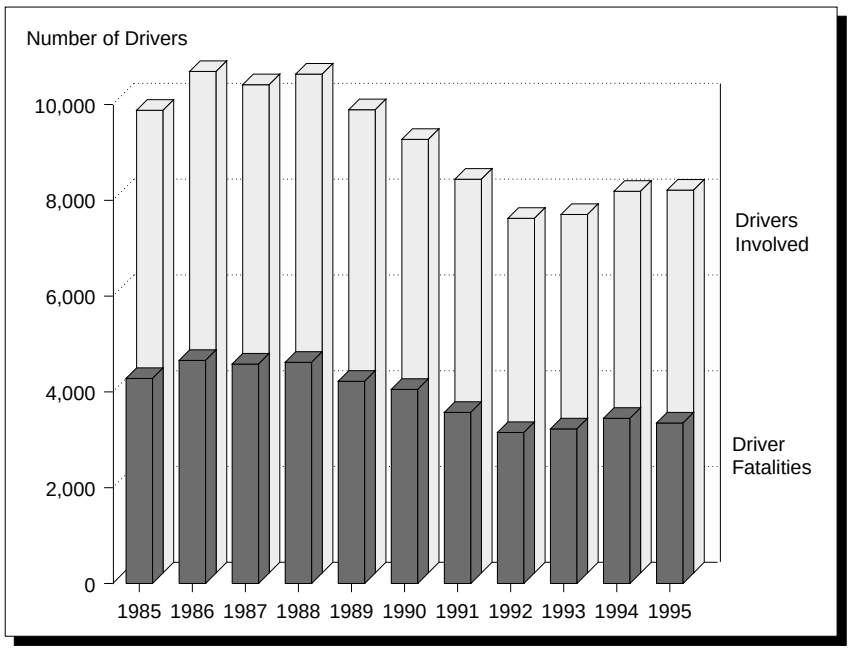


Table 1. Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age Group, 1995

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
Licensed Drivers (Percent)	6.7	7.5	22.2	22.2	16.4	10.8	4.9	9.3
Population (Percent)	8.2	5.4	15.6	16.2	11.8	8.0	3.8	9.0
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	17.7	13.2	24.5	17.7	10.2	5.6	2.2	5.6
Multi-Vehicle	12.1	9.9	22.4	19.8	13.3	8.2	3.4	9.8
All Fatal Crashes	14.2	11.2	23.2	19.0	12.1	7.3	2.9	8.2
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	67.0	47.1	33.0	27.1	23.4	21.2	19.1	27.9

"In 1995, 14 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old."

One-third 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. For the same age group, more than one-fourth of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 1995 had been drinking.

Table 2. Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 1995

	License Status					
	Valid (6,726)		Invalid (1,109)		Total (7,835)	
Driving Record	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,420	21.1	197	17.8	1,617	20.6
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	450	6.7	369	33.3	819	10.5
Previous DWI Convictions	65	1.0	54	4.9	119	1.5
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,600	23.8	200	18.0	1,800	23.0
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Convictions	1,228	18.3	247	22.3	1,475	18.8

For 76 percent of the drivers 15 to 20 years old who were involved in fatal crashes in 1995, police reported one or more errors or other factors related to the driver's behavior. The factor most often noted was "failure to keep in proper lane or running off the road," followed by "driving too fast."

In 1995, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old was $31.1 billion.

Motorcycles

An estimated 225 young motorcycle drivers (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 7,000 were injured during 1995.

Helmets are estimated to be 29 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 506 motorcyclists of all ages in 1995, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 285 lives could have been saved.

During 1995, 49 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 1995, more than one-quarter (27 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

"In 1995, 20 percent of the young drivers who were killed in crashes were intoxicated."

Alcohol

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 0.10 g/dl or greater involved in fatal crashes are considered to be *intoxicated*. This is the legal limit of intoxication in most states.

In 1995, 20 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.

Table 3. Alcohol Involvement Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes, 1995

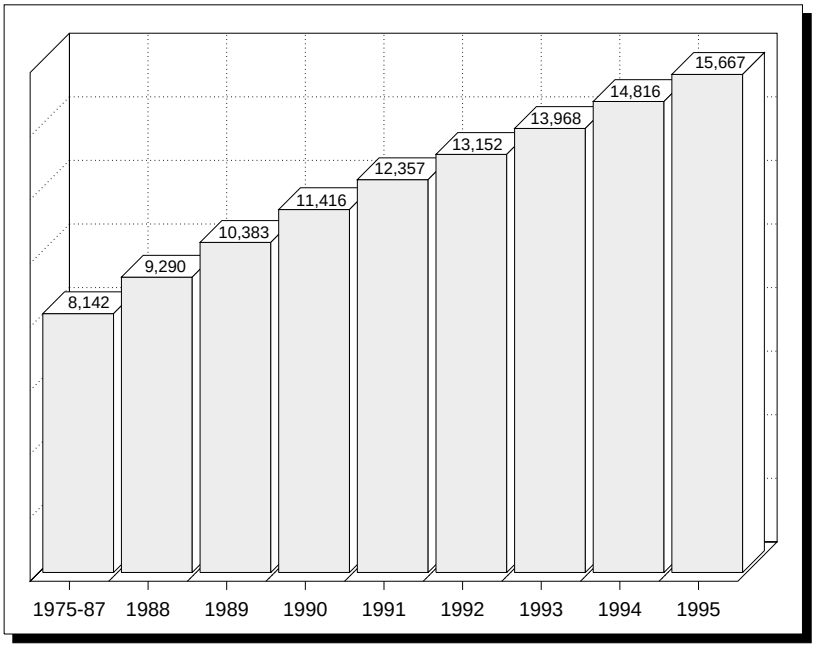
Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage With BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01-0.09 g/dl	≥0.10 g/dl
Surviving	4,642	85.6	7.1	7.3
Fatally Injured	3,351	71.5	8.8	19.8
Total	**7,993**	**79.7**	**7.8**	**12.5**

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 1995, 1 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 3 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 20 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

The intoxication rates of fatally injured young drivers involved in fatal crashes have decreased significantly since 1985. In both categories (drivers killed and drivers involved in fatal crashes), the number of drivers 15 to 20 years old who were intoxicated dropped by 56 percent between 1985 and 1995—the largest decline of any age group.

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 15,667 lives since 1975. Thirteen states have set 0.08 g/dl as the legal intoxication limit, and 30 states plus the District of Columbia have zero tolerance laws for drivers under the age of 21 (that is, drivers under 21 with BAC levels above 0.02 g/dl are considered to be legally intoxicated by the state).

Figure 2. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-1995



"NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 15,667 lives since 1975."

For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 1995, 24 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 10 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 1995, 77 percent of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 82 percent were unrestrained.

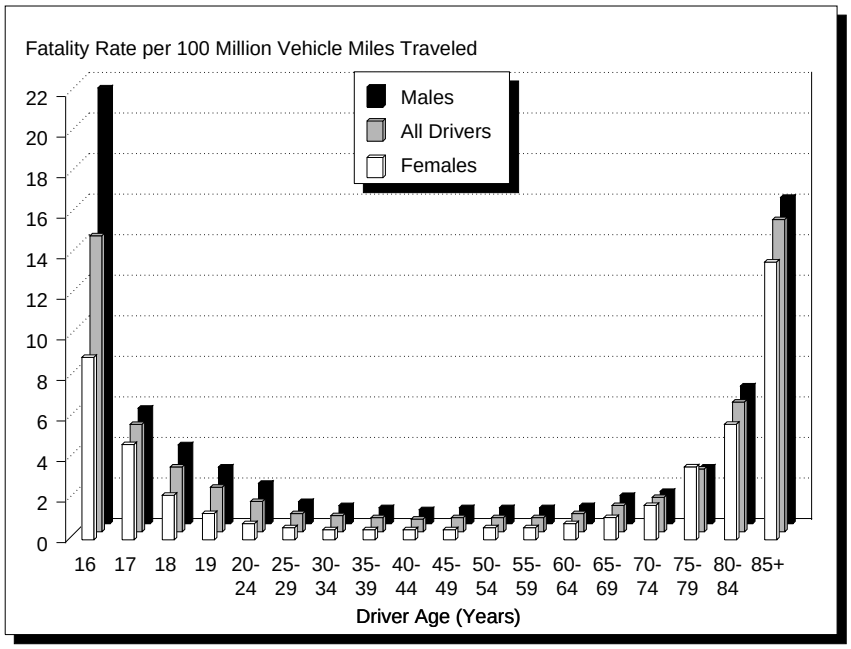
For more information:

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. Telephone inquiries should be addressed to Ms. Louann Hall at (202) 366-4198. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/ncsa. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.

When driver fatality rates are calculated on the basis of estimated annual travel, the highest rates are found among the youngest and oldest drivers. Compared with the fatality rate for drivers 25 to 65 years old, the rate for teenage drivers is about 4 times as high, and the rate for drivers in the oldest group is 17 times as high.

"The fatality rate for teenage drivers, based on estimated annual travel, is about 4 times as high as the rate for drivers 25 to 65 years old."

Figure 3. Driver Fatality Rates by Age and Sex, 1994



Young female drivers, under age 50, have a lower fatality rate than their male counterparts, on a per mile driven basis, while the rate is essentially the same for both male and female drivers over 50 years of age.

Table 4. Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Traffic Fatalities, 1985 and 1995

	1985			1995			Percentage Change, 1985-1995		
							Number		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage Age 15-20
Licensed Drivers (thousands)									
Total	156,868	13,357	8.5	177,433	11,920	6.7	+13%	-11%	-21%
Male	81,592	7,139	8.7	90,223	6,245	6.9	+11%	-13%	-21%
Female	75,276	6,218	8.3	87,210	5,675	6.5	+16%	-9%	-21%
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes									
Total	57,883	9,658	16.7	56,155	7,993	14.2	-3%	-17%	-15%
Male	44,846	7,478	16.7	41,216	5,801	14.1	-8%	-22%	-16%
Female	12,142	2,180	18.0	14,179	2,192	15.5	+17%	+1%	-14%
Driver Fatalities									
Total	25,337	4,281	16.9	24,398	3,351	13.7	-4%	-22%	-19%
Male	19,916	3,377	17.0	17,996	2,447	13.6	-10%	-28%	-20%
Female	5,419	904	16.7	6,397	904	14.1	+18%	0%	-15%

Sources: Licensed drivers—Federal Highway Administration.