



Traffic Safety Facts 1998

Young Drivers



People Saving People

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There were 182.7 million licensed drivers in the United States in 1997 (1998 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.9 percent (12.6 million) of the total, a 7.6 percent decrease from the 13.1 million young drivers in 1987.

In 1998, 7,975 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes — a 23 percent decrease from the 10,415 involved in 1988. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 26 percent between 1988 and 1998. For young males, driver fatalities dropped by 30 percent, compared with a 14 percent decrease for young females (Table 3).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 1996 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 1998, 3,427 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 348,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

In 1998, 14 percent (7,975) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (56,543) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 16 percent (1,801,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,368,000) were young drivers.

“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, 1988-1998

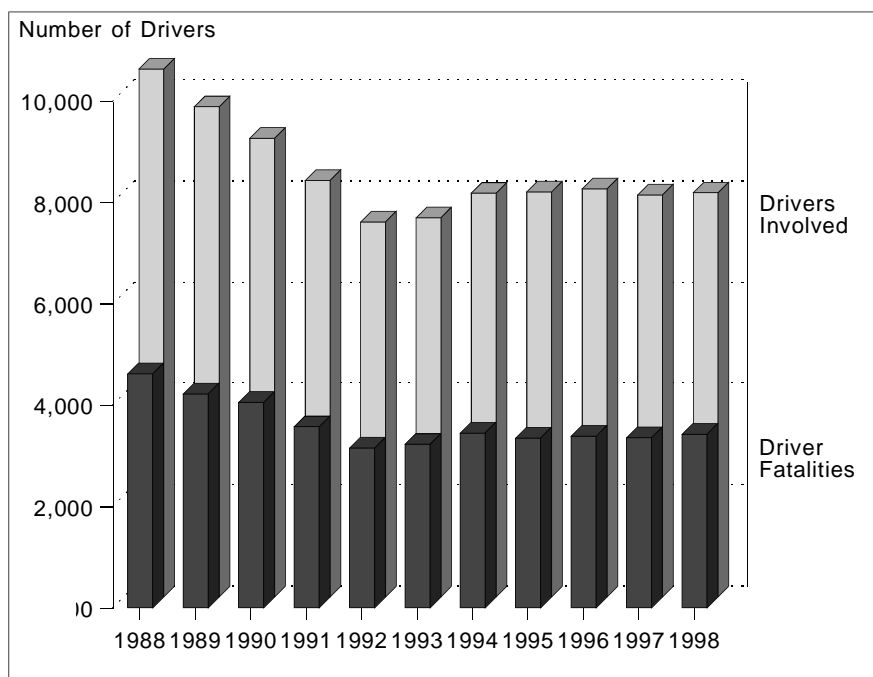


Table 1. Drivers Involved in 1998 Fatal Crashes by Age Group and 1997 Driver Involvement Rates

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
1998 Population (Percent)	8.6	5.1	14.3	16.5	12.8	8.4	3.5	9.2
Drivers Involved in 1998 Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	18.7	12.4	22.1	19.2	12.1	6.6	2.4	6.1
Multi-Vehicle	11.8	8.7	21.0	20.7	14.8	8.9	3.5	10.4
All Fatal Crashes	14.3	10.1	21.4	20.2	13.8	8.0	3.1	8.9
1997 Licensed Drivers* (Percent)	6.9	6.7	20.7	22.5	17.7	11.2	4.6	8.8
Drivers Involved in 1997 Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	62.8	46.4	32.9	26.5	23.3	21.5	20.6	28.1

* 1998 data not available.

“In 1998, 14 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”

More than one-third (359) 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, 28 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 1998 had been drinking (Table 4).

Table 2. Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 1998

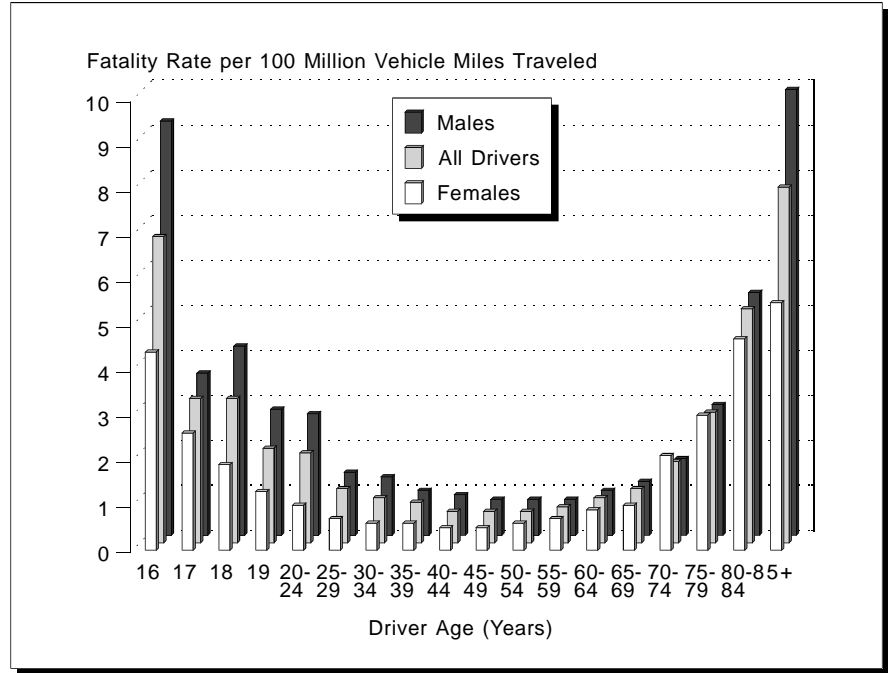
Driving Record	License Status					
	Valid (6,734)		Invalid (1,167)		Total (7,975)*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,233	18.3	152	13.0	1,385	17.4
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	439	6.5	359	20.8	799	10.0
Previous DWI Convictions	80	1.2	69	5.9	149	1.9
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,550	23.0	206	17.7	1,756	22.0
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Convictions	1,294	19.2	237	20.3	1,531	19.2

* Includes 74 drivers with unknown license status.

In 1998, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old was \$31.8 billion.

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 through 69 years old, the rate for teenage drivers (16 to 19 years old) is about 4 times as high, and the rate for drivers in the oldest group is 9 times as high.

Figure 2. Driver Fatality Rates by Age and Sex, 1994



“The fatality rate for teenage drivers, based on estimated annual travel, is about 4 times as high as the rate for drivers 25 through 69 years old.”

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, with the exception of the oldest group (Figure 2).

Table 3. Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Fatal Crashes, 1988 and 1998

	1988			1998			Percentage Change, 1988-1998		
	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	62,253	10,415	16.7	56,543	7,975	14.1	-9%	-23%	-16%
Male	47,402	7,936	16.7	40,746	5,644	13.9	-14%	-29%	-17%
Female	13,951	2,479	17.8	15,061	2,331	15.5	+8%	-6%	-13%
<i>Driver Fatalities</i>									
Total	27,253	4,619	16.9	24,729	3,427	13.9	-9%	-26%	-18%
Male	21,013	3,554	16.9	17,980	2,473	13.8	-14%	-30%	-19%
Female	6,240	1,065	17.1	6,745	954	14.1	+8%	-10%	-17%

Motorcycles

During 1998, 196 young motorcycle drivers (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 6,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 29 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 500 motorcyclists of all ages in 1998, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 307 lives could have been saved.

During 1998, 53 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 1998, more than one-fifth (22 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

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 1998, 21 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, 1998

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage With BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01-0.09 g/dl	≥0.10 g/dl
Surviving	4,548	84	8	8
Fatally Injured	3,427	72	8	21
Total	7,975	79	8	14

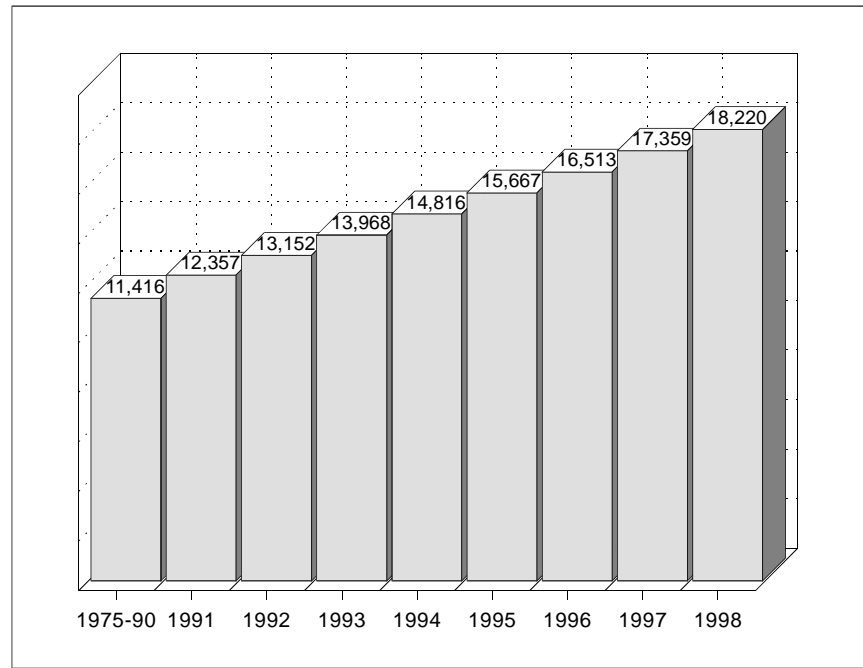
The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 1998, 2 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 3 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 21 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

In both the categories of drivers killed and drivers involved in fatal crashes, the numbers of drivers 15 to 20 years old who were intoxicated dropped by 49 for age group 15-20 percent between 1988 and 1998.

“In 1998, 21 percent of the young drivers who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.”

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 18,220 lives since 1975. In 1998, an estimated 861 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws. Fifteen states 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 3. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-1998



“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 18,220 lives since 1975.”

For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 1998, 25 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 12 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 1998, 71 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, 80 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. 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.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.