




**North Dakota's
Teenage Drivers
at Risk**



*An examination of the teen driver issue in
North Dakota, including a review of the need
for an improved graduated
driver's licensing law.*



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North Dakota's Teenage Drivers *at Risk*

Most teenagers dream of the day they can drive. To a teen, a driver's license is a ticket to freedom, the key to a new world of personal mobility. Having a license means they can cruise around after school, take a date to the movies, or cram a bunch of friends in the car and head to the football game.

And many young drivers demonstrate the skills and maturity needed to successfully and safely negotiate the roads in North Dakota. But many others do not fully comprehend that with a license comes tremendous responsibility—and risk.

In fact, 110 people in North Dakota were killed in crashes involving young drivers age 15-17 between 1998 and 2007. Similar to national statistics, the majority of fatalities in teen crashes are people other than the teen driver. Of the 110 fatalities, 47% were the young drivers themselves, while the remaining 53% were passengers, other motorists, pedestrians or bicyclists.

"This is a critical problem that needs immediate action," said Dr. Ron Miller, medical director of the MeritCare Child Services and member of the North Dakota Child Fatality Review Panel.

"Too often I've seen the physical and emotional devastation these crashes have on individuals and families. And tragically, it is not just deaths that lay a heavy burden on children and their families, but the long term handicap of Traumatic Brain Injury.

"Automobile crashes kill and maim North Dakota children more than any disease. This is not something that is just happening in other states. It happens here, and we should stop it," said Dr. Miller.

The real risk that novice drivers face is clearly evident in the disproportionate number of fatal and injury crashes involving teen drivers on North Dakota highways. While teens constitute 8.8 percent

of licensed drivers, they were involved in 20.4 percent of fatal crashes and 21.3 percent of injury crashes from 2001-2008.

In North Dakota and across the country, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teenagers, outdistancing deaths from homicide, suicide, other accidental injuries, drug dependency, cancer or heart disease.

Yet the cost of their learning to drive doesn't have to be so tragic in North Dakota. While the state has a minor driver licensing system in place, it has few protective provisions to help develop young drivers. The current system is one of the most lenient in the nation and has been classified as "marginal" by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Under most graduated systems, learning to drive is spread over an extended period of time with restrictions placed on teens at each stage that relate to passengers, nighttime driving and required training. The goal is to give teens more behind-the-wheel experience in less risky

situations so they are gradually introduced to the traffic system.

However, North Dakota teens have no minimum requirement for supervised driving time. And, although nighttime driving and the number of passengers increase the likelihood of teen crashes, there are currently no restrictions in place to limit these high-risk situations. North Dakota is the only state that does not have a comprehensive three-stage GDL system in place.

What follows is a look at the magnitude of the teen driver problem and a review of North Dakota's GDL law. By raising awareness of the novice driver safety issue—and by working together—we can curb the alarming number of teen deaths on North Dakota roads.

Behind the wheel doesn't have to be an unsafe place for teenagers.

**In North Dakota
a teen driver is
involved in a
crash about every
2.5 hours**



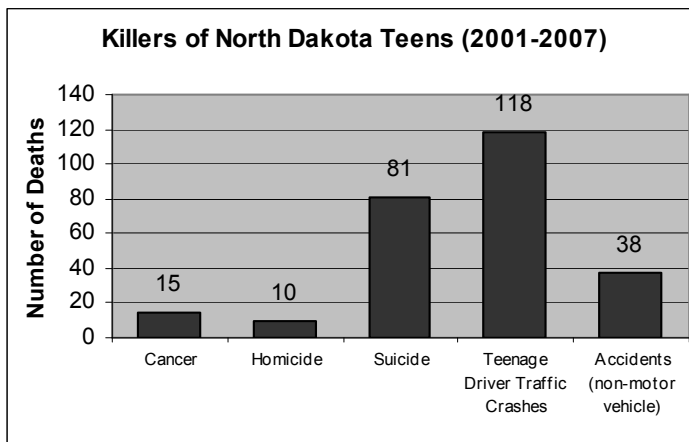
Teens are overrepresented in crashes

Despite large gains in auto safety technology, such as anti-lock braking systems and air bags, young drivers are not immune to crashes. In fact, evidence indicates in their first two to three years of driving, teens are three to four times more likely to be involved in a crash than the driving population at large—a statistic that has changed little in the past 15 years.

On a national basis, more than 2,700 teen drivers lost their lives in 2008 traffic crashes, and an estimated 228,000 teens were injured, with thousands of them paralyzed or otherwise unable to resume the life they were living. The emotional costs are staggering, and the financial costs are equally alarming. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration calculated that the lifetime cost to society for each fatality is more than \$977,000, and those not directly involved in crashes pay for nearly three-quarters of all crash costs, primarily through insurance premiums, taxes and travel delay.

The number of teen deaths in automobile crashes is grievous. But compared to the number of crashes for other age groups, the statistics are particularly deplorable. Compared to all other drivers, teens are substantially over-involved in traffic crashes on North Dakota roads.

On a national basis, the 15- to 20-year-old age group accounts for about 6 percent of the driving population but is involved in 19 percent of all fatal crashes. Crash statistics in North Dakota are just as ominous. Teens make up about 8.8 percent of the driving population but comprise about 20.4 percent of the drivers involved in fatal crashes. North Dakota teens are three times as likely to be involved in a crash than drivers age 25-34 and twice as likely to crash as drivers over the age of 85.



2008 North Dakota 'Crash Summary'

Clearly young drivers accumulate a large proportion of their crash experience in the first few years of driving. Some may question whether a 14-year-old should be allowed to get an unrestricted drivers license. It's a question that gained some momentum with the release of a study several years ago by the National Institute of Mental Health that indicated the adolescent brain may be unable to handle the responsibility of driving.

Researchers found that the parts of the brain that weigh risks, make judgments and control impulsive behavior are still developing through the teen years and don't mature until about age 25.

Once drivers do reach their mid-20s, their incidence of collisions decreases significantly and generally continues dropping steadily until a spike among drivers who are 76 and older. Perhaps through maturation, accumulated driving time, changes in driving purpose or some combination of these factors, young motorists learn how to drive more safely. The key is helping drivers gain more experience in a safe manner by implementing a comprehensive GDL system, which has been described as "training wheels for teens."

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Teens lack safe driving skills and experience

There are a number of factors that contribute to young drivers' high crash rates, especially their lack of behind-the-wheel experience.

Driving is a relatively complex skill, and regardless of the level of maturity and intelligence, young drivers are still beginners. Some skills take longer to master. In a life-threatening situation, young drivers may simply lack the experience necessary to respond in an effective manner.

Studies show basic vehicle control skills—like turning, steering, and stopping—are achieved quite quickly. But perceptual, judgment and decision-making skills take longer to acquire. For example, compared to more experienced drivers, novices concentrate eye movements in a smaller area, refer to their rearview mirror less often, and look closer in front and to the right of the vehicle. And advanced motoring skills—such as driving at night and during rush hour, detecting threats, and recovering from a skid—take plenty of practice to master.

Nationally, studies have found that driver error plays a role in upwards of 75 percent of the fatal crashes involving teen drivers. Teens typically exhibit poor multi-tasking ability and often don't

envison consequences—skills that are crucial to safe driving. Research also shows that teens are less likely to buckle up and more likely to use a cell phone while driving than older motorists.

On North Dakota's roads, the most common driver errors contributing to teen crashes are "speed/too fast for conditions", "attention/distracted" and "failed to yield." Making matters worse is the fact young drivers typically exhibit impulsive and high risk-taking behavior. Their immaturity translates into poor driving judgment. Some young drivers may actually seek out demanding or risky situations so they can test their skills, as a way to make driving more exciting.

A combination of inexperience, immaturity and risk-taking behavior combine to make the first year or two behind the wheel the most dangerous.

Unfortunately, the only way for novice drivers to gain experience, sharpen their abilities and develop proper decision-making skills is through driving. Statistics clearly show the risk of a collision declines significantly after obtaining several years of on-the-road driving experience. The challenge is allowing drivers to gain that experience in as safe a manner as possible.

North Dakota Teenage-Driver Crashes 2001-2008

Year	Fatal			Injury			Property Damage Only (PDO)			Total		
	# All Crashes	# Teenage Driver	Percent Involving Teenage Drivers	# All Crashes	# Teenage Driver	Percent Involving Teenage Drivers	# All Crashes	# Teen-age Driver	Percent Involving Teenage Drivers	# All Crashes	# Teenage Driver	Percent Involving Teenage Drivers
2001	96	21	21.9%	3,131	1,105	35.3%	11,544	2,952	25.6%	14,771	4,078	27.6%
2002	84	15	17.9%	3,253	1,135	34.9%	12,790	3,310	25.9%	16,127	4,460	27.7%
2003	95	23	24.2%	3,248	1,097	33.8%	13,226	3,184	24.1%	16,569	4,304	26.0%
2004	95	17	17.9%	2,705	875	32.3%	14,130	3,197	22.6%	16,930	4,089	24.2%
2005	106	19	17.9%	2,751	837	30.4%	12,987	2,955	22.8%	15,844	3,811	24.1%
2006	101	24	23.8%	2,701	767	28.4%	12,292	2,551	20.8%	15,094	3,342	22.1%
2007	95	22	23.2%	3,001	838	27.9%	13,133	2,713	20.7%	16,229	3,573	22.0%
2008	97	16	16.5%	3,062	847	27.7%	16,387	2,678	16.3%	19,546	3,541	18.1%
Total	769	157	20.4%	23,852	7,501	31.3%	106,489	23,540	22.3%	131,110	31,198	24.0%

2008 North Dakota 'Crash Summary'



More passengers, night driving increase risk

While teens often operate under the maxim, the more the merrier when they're driving around, crash reports indicate that it may be the case of the more the deadlier. And driving at night only adds to the deadly consequences for teen motorists.

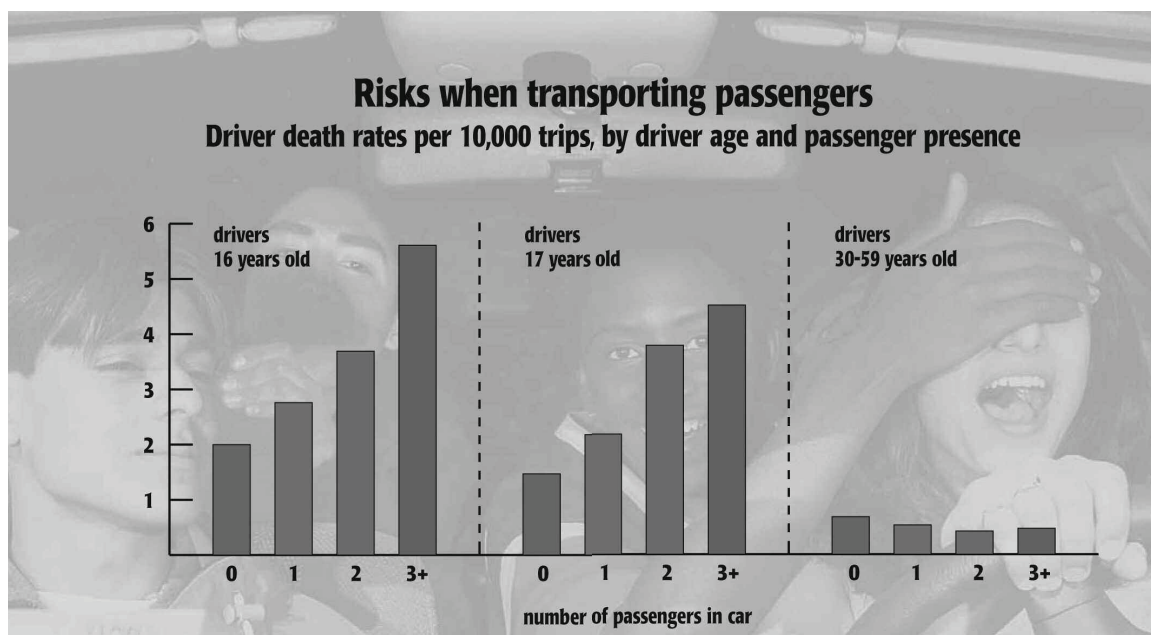
According to a number of national studies, the presence of teen passengers increases the crash risk of unsupervised teen drivers. The risk increases significantly with the number of passengers. When there are multiple passengers in the vehicle, the crash risk is three to five times greater than when driving alone. According to the studies, passenger presence is associated with increased crash risk for both male and female teen drivers and the risk is greater for younger teens age 16 and 17 than for older teen drivers.

Indeed, about two-thirds of crash deaths of teens nationwide that involve 16-year-old drivers

occur when the beginners were driving with teen passengers, studies show.

What makes matters worse is young drivers who carry passengers commit more driver errors than other drivers. Whether it's because of the distraction of having other young people in the car or the added peer pressure to take risks while driving, teenagers commit more violations with passengers in the car, violations that often lead to crashes.

Another contributing factor to those crashes is the time of day teens drive. Studies show that driving on weekends and driving at night are significant risk issues. In fact, four out of 10 teenage deaths in motor vehicles occur between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m., according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Nighttime driving restrictions in graduated driver license laws typically are associated with crash reductions of 40 to 60 percent during the restricted hours, studies show.



Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety



Comprehensive GDL laws save more lives

As of 2009, North Dakota is the only state without a comprehensive GDL system that includes an intermediate phase. As a result, the obstacles a teenager must hurdle before gaining an unrestricted license under the current system are minimal compared to other such systems across the country. There are no restrictions on the time of day a teen can drive or on the number on passengers the novice driver can transport. Plus, there is no required training time spent with a licensed parent or guardian. Couple this with the fact no other state licenses teens earlier than North Dakota and you have a system that falls woefully short of nationally recognized guidelines.

Clearly, teen drivers in North Dakota have the highest crash risk of any age group in the state with tragic consequences. The problem is the worst among the youngest motorists who have the most limited driving experience and an immaturity that results in risk-taking behind the wheel.

The solution that all other states have employed are comprehensive graduated driver licensing laws that contain restrictions on teens to help them gain practice behind the wheel under the safest possible conditions. Learning the fundamentals of driving and becoming comfortable in traffic require concentration and practice.

Effective GDL measures remove distractions and reduce risky situations for novice drivers so they can focus on the road and gain the experience they need.

Unfortunately, North Dakota's licensing system doesn't contain several of the components required to make them effective in reducing injuries and deaths. These components—including supervised driving practice and restrictions on passengers and nighttime driving—have been proven in dozens of studies to be the keys to keeping young drivers safe as they learn the rules of the road and the intricacies of driving.

Among the most compelling of the studies was performed by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Center for Injury Research and Policy. Funded by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, the report found that 16-year-old drivers are involved in 38 percent fewer fatal crashes and 40 percent fewer crashes resulting in injuries if their state has a GDL program with at least five of seven components. The seven components included in the study were:

- A minimum age of at least 16 years old for receiving a learner's permit.
- A requirement to hold the learner's permit for at least six months before receiving a license that allows any unsupervised driving.
- A requirement for certification of at least 30 hours of supervised driving practice during the learner stage.
- An intermediate stage of licensing with a minimum entry age of at least 16 years and six months.
- A nighttime driving restriction for intermediate license holders, beginning no later than 10 p.m.
- A passenger restriction for intermediate license holders, allowing no more than one passenger (except family members).
- A minimum age of 17 years for full, unrestricted licensure.

The study also found that in states with GDL laws that have four of the seven components, 16-year-old drivers were involved in 21 percent fewer fatal crashes and 36 percent fewer injury crashes.

Strengthening teen licensing laws is an important step that will reduce needless deaths and injuries on North Dakota highways and help young drivers adjust to their new responsibilities. A comprehensive GDL system is one of the most effective actions the North Dakota Legislature can take to save both young lives and the lives of others involved in crashes with young drivers.

Comprehensive GDL programs can reduce fatal crashes up to 38 percent.



Few protective provisions in ND's Existing Law

Compared to guidelines for an effective GDL law, North Dakota's law falls woefully short

North Dakota's Current Law

Learner's Permit

- Must be at least 14 years old.
- Must pass vision and knowledge test.
- Drivers must be accompanied by someone who is at least 18 years old and has at least three years of driving experience.
- Must wear seat belts at all times.

Minor's Driver's License

- Must be at least 14 years and 6 months of age.
- Must hold learner's permit for minimum of 6 months.
- Must pass road test.
- If under age 16, driver's education must be completed prior to road test.
- Anyone under age 16 is restricted to the parent or legal guardian's vehicles.
- Must wear seat belts at all times.
- The permit or license of a minor under age 18 will be cancelled if they accumulate six or more points on their driving record or commit an alcohol-related offense while operating a motor vehicle. This includes minor in possession or minor in consumption of alcohol.

Unrestricted License

- Must be at least 18 years old.
- Drivers under the age of 21 with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of .02 or greater are considered legally to be under the influence of alcohol.
- Front-seat occupants must wear seat belts.

Recommended GDL

Learner's License

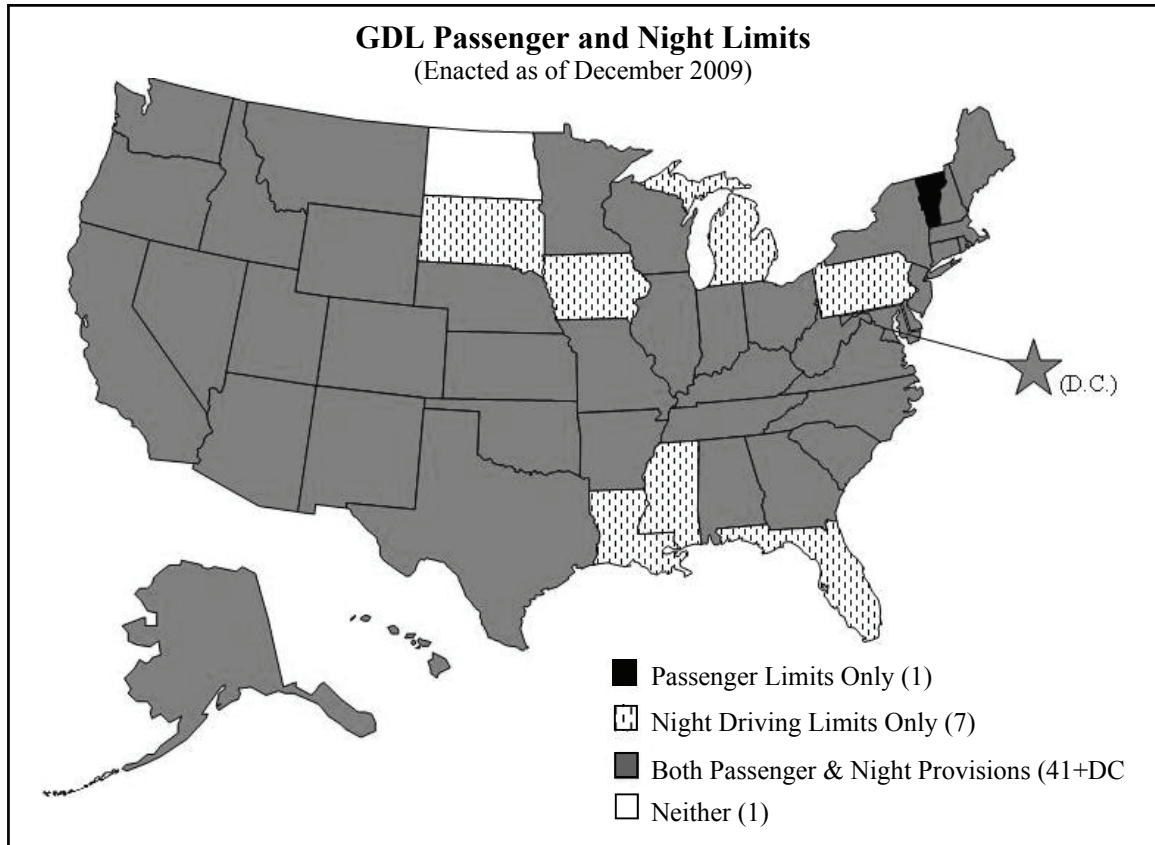
- Must be at least 16 years old.
- Must pass vision and knowledge test.
- Drivers must be accompanied by someone at least 21.
- All passengers must have seatbelts on at all times.
- No serious accident or traffic convictions within six months prior to making application.
- Six-month holding period
- Novice driver should be required to take a basic driver education course.
- Novice drivers should have at least 50 hours practice (including nighttime driving) certified by a parent, guardian or licensed instructor.
- Novice drivers should not be permitted to use telecommunications devices (cell phones, instant messaging, etc.) while driving on an learner's stage.

Intermediate License

- Must be at least 16 and a half years old.
- Must have successfully completed first stage.
- All passengers must have seatbelts on at all times.
- No serious accident or traffic conviction within six months prior to making application.
- Six-month minimum holding period.
- No more than one teen passenger for first six months.
- Restricted from driving between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.
- Drivers should take and pass an advanced driver education course over the course of a year.
- Novice drivers should not be permitted to use telecommunications devices (cell phones, instant messaging, etc.) while driving on an Intermediate License.

Unrestricted License

- Must be at least 18 years old.
- Successful completion of stage two.
- Pass a final road test.



Support for a Better Licensing System

Currently, 49 states and the District of Columbia have enacted GDL legislation in an effort to develop young drivers without putting them at greater risk. Only North Dakota has yet to implement a three-phased GDL system.

A recent survey of AAA's 60,000 members in North Dakota found overwhelming support for the protective provisions included in the intermediate phase of most GDL systems:

- 82 percent support limiting passengers to one non-family member
- 89 percent support imposing nighttime driving restrictions
- 97 percent support restricting cell phone use while driving, and
- 88 percent supporting moving the driving age to 16 years or later.

A survey conducted in 2008 by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at North Dakota State University also found strong support from parents of teen drivers. Among changes recommended by parents are raising the permit age; lengthening the permit holding period to 12 months; and requiring 50 hours of supervised driving.

Questions and Answers



Q: In rural areas and farming communities, are strict GDL limits workable since driving is a necessity and not an option? Large distances mean lengthy commutes to school, work etc.

A: Higher fatality rates occur in rural communities: In fact, in 2008, 86.6 percent of fatal crashes occurred in rural areas where the roads are much less forgiving of the kinds of mistakes young drivers make. Rural, suburban, and urban teen drivers all suffer from immaturity and inexperience. They are at greater risk no matter where they live and what lifestyle they lead. Responsible exemptions for travel to/from school or work activities have not significantly reduced GDL effectiveness.

Q: My child is an outstanding student. Isn't this penalizing them?

A: Simply because a child makes good grades or is well-behaved does not make them a good driver. Skills require practice and experience. GDL allows for teen drivers to gain experience while limiting exposure to risky driving conditions.

Q: Why are nighttime restrictions necessary? My child must work in the evenings and many times teenagers do not even get home from school games/functions until later than the restricted time.

A: Death and injury for teen drivers are more likely to occur at night: Nationally, the nighttime fatal crash rate for 16-year-olds is about twice as high as during the day. In North Dakota, 55 percent of nighttime crashes involving 16-year-old drivers occur between the hours of 9 and 11 p.m. even though the majority of teen driving occurs during daylight hours. Responsible exemptions for travel to/from school or work activities have not significantly reduced GDL effectiveness.

Q: Aren't passenger restrictions more dangerous because they put more teen drivers on the road?

A: Several studies have shown that teen driver crash rates nearly double with one teen passenger in the vehicle, and this increases to 5 times with 3 or more passengers. GDL laws often exempt siblings and allow for passengers while driving with adult supervision.

Q: Isn't it the parent's responsibility to prepare their child to drive and not the government's?

A: Driving is a privilege granted by the state, not a right. States have an interest in protecting their citizens and already significantly regulate licensure. Putting limits in teen drivers is not something new. States with comprehensive GDL in place, including later licensure, stringent passenger and nighttime restrictions, have proven that significant teen crash reduction rates can be achieved. These restrictions have limited, short-term impact on lifestyles, but bring large safety benefits.

Q: Can GDL laws be enforced?

A: Yes, but they need to be clear and concise so that both law enforcement officers and parents understand them. Parents are primarily the most effective enforcers of GDL limitations and the law provides them extra support as they are establishing driving boundaries. In some situations, school resource and law enforcement officers know a young person's license status and are able to take appropriate enforcement action.

Q. Why target teens? Elderly drivers are a bigger problem.

A. While elderly drivers are a concern as crash rates begin to increase in drivers over 65 years of age, teen drivers are a much greater risk. In North Dakota, data from 2001-2008 shows teen drivers are overrepresented in crashes—while they make up less than 9 percent of licensed drivers, they accounted for 24 percent of total crashes. Drivers age 65 years and older, on the other hand, are underrepresented in crashes—while they make up 17 percent of licensed drivers, they account for only 12.5 percent of total crashes. Even among more elderly drivers, teens are twice as likely to crash as drivers over the age of 85.

Resources: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), CDC, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and North Dakota Department of Transportation.

The somber statistics outlined in this booklet can be improved. Lives can be saved and injuries prevented through passage of a comprehensive Graduated Driver's Licensing law.

The main hurdle is overcoming the "perception" that graduated licensing is a controversial issue not supported by the public. In stark contrast to the perception, studies and surveys have shown overwhelming support by both the general public and parents of teens. It is important North Dakota lawmakers hear from you so they know how their constituents stand on this issue.

Contact your legislators and tell them it's time to improve North Dakota's licensing law in order to save lives and make the roads safer.

To find your legislators, go to www.legis.nd.gov and click on "Legislators & Districts"

AAA resources aimed at keeping roads safe

Driving is a complex skill, especially when you are required to navigate crowded highways, share the road with massive trucks, decipher road signs at 60 mph, maneuver on icy roads and determine how close you should drive compared to other motorists.

As an advocate for motorists and travelers, AAA has produced dozens of pamphlets, videos and more regarding all aspects of driving, including driving in inclement conditions, parking, driving on the freeway, avoiding road rage and more. Through these educational materials, AAA works to keep everyone safe behind the wheel.

Among the items available is the **New**

Driver Packet, a free packet of three brochures designed both for parents and teens.

The brochure for teens helps new drivers make good decisions about driving and contains tips on avoiding 10 common bad driving behaviors. Another one for parents offers advice on safeguarding your son or daughter behind the wheel. And the third includes parent-to-parent and parent-to-teen driving contracts that spell out the driving rules parents and teens expect from each other. To order the packet, mail your request to:

AAA New Driver Packet, PO Box 10338,
Fargo, ND 58106-0338.

AAA also offers a wealth of information online. Visit AAAexchange.com and AAA.com/StartSmart today.





AAA gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of the North Dakota Department of Transportation, North Dakota Highway Patrol and Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute in providing crash statistics for this report that documents North Dakota's **Teenage Drivers *at Risk***



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