

Press Release



Greene County Public Health
A Safe Communities Grantee of Ohio Department of Public Safety
Ohio State Highway Patrol-Traffic Safety Division
360 Wilson Drive, Xenia, OH 45385



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Rules for the Road: Essential for Teen Driving Success

*Talk to Teens About the Importance of Driving Safety
During National Teen Driver Safety Week*

XENIA, OH — This fall, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is teaming up with Greene County Public Health’s Safe Communities Coalition to support National Teen Driver Safety Week, October 20-26, 2024. It is important to discuss safe driving habits with teens every day, but Teen Driver Safety Week serves as an opportunity for parents and guardians to have a conversation with teens about safe driving habits. Teen drivers need to know the [Rules of the Road](#) before parents hand over the keys. Ultimately, it’s parents who are in control.

Data indicates that traffic crashes are a leading cause of death for 15-20-year-olds. Young drivers who died in traffic crashes decreased by 5% from 2,133 in 2021 to 2,034 in 2022. The number of injured young drivers decreased by 11% during the same period. Also, the rate of drivers involved in fatal traffic crashes per 100,000 licensed drivers for young female drivers was 22.74 and 58.73 for male drivers in 2022.

“Parents play a critical role in teaching teen drivers safe driving habits,” said Loressa Gonyer, Safe Communities Coalition Coordinator. “New teen drivers are gaining experience behind the wheel, which increases the chance of dangerous situations for the teen and other roadway users around them,” she said. “This is why it’s so important for parents to model safe driving behaviors themselves and have discussions with their teens about the choices they make to keep everyone on the road safe. Start the conversation today and continue it every day. NHTSA [offers parents and guardians helpful tips](#) and a framework for having discussions with teen drivers about risky driving behaviors that can lead to fatal consequences.”

It’s a parent’s responsibility to help teen drivers make smart choices to stay safe on the road. NHTSA gives parents and guardians [tips](#) on how to talk about safer driving. These tips include discussions on how to influence positive behaviors and how to approach dangerous and deadly driving behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use, lack of seat belt use, distracted driving, speeding, or driving with passengers.

NHTSA’s website, www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving, has detailed information and statistics on teen driving, and outlines tips parents can use to address teen driver safety risks:

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1. **Impaired Driving:** While teens are too young to legally buy, possess, or consume alcohol, nationally, approximately 1 in 5 teen passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes have alcohol in their system. Alcohol isn't the only substance that can keep teens from driving safely: marijuana affects a driver's ability to react to their surroundings. Remind teens that driving under the influence of any impairing substance — including illicit or prescription drugs, or over-the-counter medication — can have deadly consequences. Let teens know that safe driving behaviors are rewarded with the continued privilege to drive.
2. **Seat Belt Safety:** Wearing a seat belt is a simple way teens can stay safer in a vehicle. Unfortunately, too many teens aren't buckling up. In fact, approximately one half of the teen passenger vehicle drivers who die in crashes are unbuckled. Teen drivers and passengers are more likely to die in a crash if they are unbuckled (nine out of 10 of the passengers who died were also unbuckled). Empower teens to stand strong and confirm everyone is buckled before the vehicle moves. Reward teens with driving privileges for buckling up every trip, every time, and requiring all their passengers in every seat to do the same.
3. **Distracted Driving:** Cell phone use while driving is more than just risky — it can be deadly. Texting while driving is outlawed in 49 states, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Remind teens about the dangers of using a phone while driving and clarify that any phone use (texting, talking, recording video, or using any social media apps) is unacceptable. Even if they are stopped at a light, remind teens that posting on social media while driving is unacceptable *and* illegal.

Distracted driving isn't limited to cell phone use. Other passengers, audio and climate controls in the vehicle, and eating or drinking while driving are all examples of dangerous distractions for any driver. According to the most recent data available, in 2021, among teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes, 7% were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. Remind teens that headphones are not appropriate to wear while driving a vehicle. All drivers need to be able to hear another vehicle's horn or the siren from an emergency vehicle, so they can safely move over and out of the path.

4. **Speed Limits:** Speeding is a critical issue for all drivers, but it's especially deadly for teens with less experience. In fact, approximately one-third of all teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes are speeding at the time of a crash. Data shows that males were more likely to be involved in fatal speeding-related crashes than females. Practice driving with your teen in different types of weather and talk about the importance of speed awareness in changing road conditions. Remind teens to always drive within the speed limit.
5. **Passengers:** Passengers in a teen's vehicle can lead to disastrous consequences. Research shows the risk of a fatal crash dramatically increases in direct relation to the number of passengers in a vehicle. The likelihood that a teen driver will engage in risky behavior triples when multiple passengers are in the same vehicle. Many states limit the number of passengers teen drivers can have in their vehicle; parents should know what those restrictions are and enforce the law for their teen driver.

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Parents can help teen drivers by discussing risky driving behaviors. Self-reported surveys show that teens whose parents set firm rules for driving typically engaged in less risky driving behaviors and were involved in fewer crashes.

Teens need to understand the rules, whether there are any other restrictions outlined in Ohio's graduated driver licensing ([GDL law](#)), and the deadly consequences that could occur. By knowing and enforcing the laws, the teen driver's safety and that of other road users can be improved.

“While teens will learn much of this content in driver education, nothing replaces the conversations that take place at home or in the car. Parents should set these rules before handing over the car keys,” Gonyer said. “Parents need to be proactive and start the conversation about safe driving during National Teen Driver Safety Week, then drive with their teens and keep these conversations going every chance they get. Teaching teens safe behaviors behind the wheel is a shared responsibility, and we all have a part to play.”

For more information about National Teen Driver Safety Week, visit www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving. For more information on Greene County Safe Communities, email Loressa Gonyer at lgonyer@gcph.info or call 937-374-5655.

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