

AAA Mid-Atlantic News Release

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One River Place, Wilmington, DE 19801

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Contact: Catherine L. Rossi Ela A. Voluck
Office: 302-299-4424 302-299-4426
Cell: 302-299-4924 302-353-6563

16-Year Old Drivers In Fewer Fatal Crashes In States with Stronger Teen Driving Laws Says AAA Foundation Study

Delaware only state with seven parts of effective GDL program

Sixteen-year-old drivers are involved in 38 percent fewer fatal crashes and 40 percent fewer injury crashes if their state has a graduated driver licensing (GDL) program with at least five of seven common components, according to a study released today by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Delaware is the only state in the nation with all seven basic GDL components. During the study period, no state had more than five GDL components in effect. As of February 15, 2007, Kentucky, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia have six and Delaware has seven.

“Motor vehicle crashes remain the number one cause of death for teens in the United States. Roughly 1,000 16-year-old drivers are involved in fatal crashes each year,” said Catherine L. Rossi, Manager of Public and Government Affairs, AAA Mid-Atlantic. “These crashes deserve our attention just as much as guns, drugs and violence do.”

The Research & Findings

The AAA Foundation funded researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to analyze GDL programs implemented in the United States between 1994 and 2004 and their impact. In states where laws are weak, AAA is challenging state legislators to strengthen existing GDL programs.

- In states with GDL programs that have four of the seven components, 16-year-old drivers were involved in 21 percent fewer fatal crashes and 36 percent fewer crashes with injuries.
- Three-stage GDL programs are more effective at reducing crash rates than GDL programs that do not include three stages of licensure. In the states with three-stage GDL programs, 16-year-old drivers were involved in 11 percent fewer fatal crashes, and 19 percent fewer crashes with injuries.

Currently, 43 states and the District of Columbia have enacted three-stage GDL systems, and all states have some form of GDL. A typical three-stage GDL program comprises a learner stage, during which all driving must be supervised; followed by an intermediate stage, during which unsupervised driving is permitted except under certain conditions (such as at night or with passengers); and finally full, unrestricted licensure.

The Seven Basic GDL Components

1. A minimum age of at least 16 years for receiving a learner's permit.
2. A requirement to hold the learner's permit for at least 6 months before receiving a license that allows any unsupervised driving.
3. A requirement for certification of at least 30 hours of supervised driving practice during the learner stage.
4. An intermediate stage of licensing with a minimum entry age of at least 16 years and 6 months.
5. A nighttime driving restriction for intermediate license holders, beginning no later than 10 p.m.
6. A passenger restriction for intermediate license holders, allowing no more than one passenger (except family members).
7. A minimum age of 17 years for full, unrestricted licensure.

Delaware has each GDL component.

Delaware's Standout Among States

Delaware's teen driving law is now one of the strongest in the country since legislators significantly strengthened the state's GDL program last year. Delaware's initial GDL program had much weaker versions of some, but not all of the seven components listed above. Statistics indicate that Delaware's GDL is reducing teen crashes and deaths.

"This research shows Delaware is definitely on the right track," said Rossi. "When we ease teens into licensure by limiting their exposure to risky situations, they gain much-needed experience behind the wheel - saving injuries and lives. The study shows the effect that legislation can have on teen driver safety. Stronger teen driving laws are working," said Rossi.

Delaware had 1,001 crashes involving 16-year-old drivers during 1998. (*before Delaware implemented a GDL in 1999*) In 2005, Delaware had 571 crashes involving 16-year-old drivers. That represents a reduction of almost half.

"Having a strong GDL law is the largest and most critical part of our overall strategy to reduce teen deaths and injuries in Delaware," said Tricia Roberts, Director of the Office of Highway Safety. "To that end, we have worked closely with legislators and our partners, like AAA, in the safety and law enforcement communities in order to develop the most comprehensive law possible. We will continue to work with these partners on educational programs that support the GDL law and encourage safe driving habits among teens."

Challenge to Parents

AAA is issuing a challenge to parents to "keep the keys" from their teen driver until a Parent-Teen Agreement is signed. The *Parent-Teen Agreement* can be found online at www.aaa.com/publicaffairs <<http://www.aaa.com/publicaffairs>>.

"Regardless of the law, parents should set clear driving rules. It may be inconvenient for a parent to be the chauffeur for awhile longer, but when it saves lives, it's worth it," said Rossi.

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Nearly 27 percent of U.S. drivers are AAA members. Established in 1947 by AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is an independent, publicly funded, 501(c)(3) charitable research and educational organization. The AAA Foundation's mission is to prevent traffic deaths and injuries by conducting research into their causes and by educating the public about strategies to prevent crashes and reduce injuries when they do occur. The report "Nationwide Review of Graduated Driver Licensing," is available online at www.aaafoundation.org <<http://www.aaafoundation.org>>