

Remind Young Drivers To Wear Seatbelts and Slow Down

Summer has arrived and with it comes the excitement of driving with the windows or top down, playing loud music and cruising to see who is around. It's a good time to remind your teenage drivers to wear their seatbelts and that their passengers should put them on as well. And it is important that drivers are aware that alcohol is not the only cause of accidents; distracting behaviors while driving, and driving too fast are both very dangerous, so drivers should keep both hands on the wheel and watch their speed.

According to recent teen driving research by SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) and Liberty Mutual Insurance Group, teens rated the following behaviors or activities as "extremely" or "very" distracting:

Instant or text messaging while driving – 37%

[The teen driver's] emotional state - 20%

Having several friends in the car - 19%

Talking on a cell phone - 14%

Eating or drinking - 7%

Having a friend in the car - 5% (*Massachusetts Junior Operator's License Policy: For the first 6 months, no passengers under the age of 18 unless they are supervised by a driver age 21 or older*)

Listening to music - 4%

In the state and national news over the past few months, there have been fatalities involving youth who had not been drinking but who were reportedly driving too fast. While the cause of some of the accidents may have been speed, in some instances youth were not wearing seatbelts. Crashes are the number one cause of death and injury of teens in the U.S. Crashes take more lives of our youth than alcohol, drugs, violence, and suicide. Statistics show that wearing seatbelts saves lives. According to statistics released by James Madison University, approximately 35,000 people die in motor vehicle crashes each year and about 50 percent, 17,000 of these people could be saved if they wore their safety belts. Hundreds of other people are disabled for life in road accidents where they were not wearing a seat belt.

The 2012 Bedford Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which asked about seatbelt use, tells us that 64% of high school students always always wear their seatbelts. That leaves 36% of youth at greater risk.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), teenage drivers and passengers are among those least likely to wear their seat belts. The most common reasons given by drivers in the 16-20 age group for not wearing safety belts were that they forgot or were only driving a short distance. The myth that you do not need a seat belt if you are driving only for a short distance or at a very low speed is simply inaccurate. Almost 50% of accidents happen at speeds of less than 40 mph, and fatalities have been known to happen at a speed of 12 mph. It is also a fact that 80% of accidents involving a fatality occur less than 25 miles from home.

Adults tend to remind new drivers about the rules of driver safety. Whether they are in high school or they are returning home from college and possibly have not driven for several months, the reminder bears repeating. Buckle up- and slow down.

Because this is such a long standing issue, NOYS (National Organizations for Youth Safety) recently created a website called Under Your Influence: www.underyourinfluence.org/StartingTheConversation.html Check it out for tips on how to start a conversation with your teen regarding safe driving.