

What you should know about...

Extended Learner's Permit Holding Periods



Graduated Driver Licensing

A key component of an effective GDL system is a longer learner's permit holding period. How do learner's permit holding periods relate to the crash rates of novice teen drivers?



While teenage driver crashes and casualties decreased in the past decade, and in spite of recent attention to the issue, teens are still high risk drivers and unintentional injury from motor vehicle crashes remains the number one cause of death among teens in the United States. In absolute numbers, 3,889 teens aged 16-19 – more than 10 every day – died in passenger vehicles driven by a teen in 2005. Per population, teen drivers age 16-19 are involved in about twice as many crashes, fatal and non-fatal, as drivers aged 30-59 (Ferguson, Teoh, & McCart, 2007).

These extremely high crash rates for teens, and 16-year-olds in particular, are related to driver inexperience and driver immaturity. Driving experience must be accumulated sooner or later regardless of when a person starts to drive. But, initial driving experience can be limited to lower risk situations (e.g., daylight and limited number of teen passengers) under a Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) system which has three stages of licensure:

1. A learner's permit that allows driving only while supervised by a fully licensed driver.
2. An intermediate license that allows unsupervised driving under certain restrictions.
3. A full license.

Longer learner permit periods can reduce crashes by delaying full licensure (stage three license). According to Williams, 2007:

- Prior to the GDL movement, most jurisdictions had no required minimum time periods for the learner stage.
- That situation has changed dramatically (see Table 1), with all but three jurisdictions having extended the learner phase, including 44 requiring a learner permit period of at least six months.
- The amount of time before full licensure depends largely on the minimum permit age, which varies from 14 to 16 in the United States, and the length of the learner and intermediate periods.

An extended learner period provides more time to practice and gain driving experience, and this is also encouraged by parent certification requirements. Table 2 shows that in 43 jurisdictions, parents are required to certify that their teen drove at least a minimum number of hours under supervision, anywhere from 12 to 100, although the norm is 40-50.

Table 1. Learner Stage Mandatory Holding Periods*

Number of months	Number of jurisdictions
12	5
9	1
6	38
2-5	4
0	3**

*2 jurisdictions have lesser requirements for driver education graduates

**Includes Wyoming, which has a 10-day holding period

Table 2. Learner Stage Parent Certification Requirements*

Number of hours	Number of jurisdictions
100	1
60	2
50	18
40	9
35	1
30	4
25	2
20	4
0	10

*5 jurisdictions have lesser requirements for driver education graduates Williams, A.F. (2007). Contribution of the components of graduated licensing to crash reductions. *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 177-184.

This fact sheet reflects current information presented at the International Symposium on Novice Teen Driving: GDL and Beyond – Research Foundations for Policy and Practice held in Tucson, Arizona on February 5-7, 2007. For more information, go to www.nsc.org/gdl/.

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Evidence from Current Research on the Effectiveness of Learner's Permit Holding Periods

Although it is not an easy task to sort out the contribution of various GDL components, there is clear evidence that three components – the extended learner's permit period, night restrictions, and passenger restrictions – each contribute to the positive effects of a GDL system. According to Williams, 2007:

- There is evidence that GDL systems combining these components yield the greatest crash reductions.
- The single most effective GDL provision appears to be the extension of the learner's period when this extension has the effect of delaying the time at which unsupervised driving is permitted. Crash reductions are due to reduced exposure to driving risk during this time.

In addition to delaying when a young person can drive unsupervised, the learner's permit period also allows novice drivers to learn how to drive and accumulate their initial experience under low-risk conditions – allowing beginners to practice under parental supervision before attempting the road test for an intermediate license.

By 2006, all but seven states required the learner's permit to be held for at least six months. Typically, after a learner's permit period of at least six months, teenagers earn intermediate licenses that often prohibit driving unsupervised at night or carrying more than one teenage passenger.

Age of obtaining a learner's permit can be a factor as well as length of learner's holding period. An analysis of fatal crash rates for drivers aged 15-17 in states with different minimum learner's permit and intermediate license ages found that as these ages decrease, fatal crash rates increase. The earlier young people are allowed to learn and the earlier they become licensed are both associated with higher fatal crash rates (Preusser & Tison, 2007).

Attempts to Increase Effectiveness of Learner's Permit Holding Period & Next Steps

Further increasing the amount of time to build driving experience as a learner, and raising the minimum permit age, are ways that states are modifying GDL systems to increase effectiveness. According to Williams, 2007:

- California, Hawaii, and Virginia have raised the permit age. Such as, in 2004, California increased the minimum permit age from 15 to 15½, and this combines with a holding period requirement of six months and a licensing age of 16. Studies are needed of how these changes affect licensing ages, and whether there are negative effects, for example, an increase in illegal driving.
- Six states have extended the learner's permit holding period by lowering the starting age by three or six months. This change could encourage earlier licensure (Williams, 2007). Earlier licensure is associated with higher fatal crash rates (Preusser and Tison, 2007).
- Lengthening the supervised driving period to 12 months may provide better experience and exposure to a larger number and greater variety of driving situations (Foss, 2007).
- Effectiveness may be enhanced if parents ensure that their teens obtain a wide range of experience. Parent behavior may be key in GDL systems, as supervisors during learning stages and as driving behavior role models (Foss, 2007).

Because supervised driving is a key related component, study of how to structure supervised driving to maximize effectiveness is needed. As noted in 43 states, parents must certify that their teens had at least a minimum number of hours of supervised driving while they had a learner's permit – typically 40 to 50 hours allowing novice teens to gain driving experience in safer circumstances. Some states require some supervised driving hours to be at night. However, more information is needed on how much supervised driving occurs under these requirements and on whether these requirements affect teen driver crashes (Williams, 2007; Foss, 2007).

References (These sources contain a complete listing of secondary references.)

- Ferguson, S.A., Teoh, E.R., & McCartt, A.T. (2007). Progress in teenage crash risk during the last decade. *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 137-145.
- Foss, R. (2007). Improving graduated driver licensing systems: Implement principles rather than laws. *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 185-192.
- Preusser, D.F & Tison, J. (2007). GDL then and now. *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 159-163.
- Williams, A.F. (2007). Contribution of the components of graduated licensing to crash reductions. *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 177-184.

NOTE: James Hedlund summarizes information presented and discussed at the Symposium. This summary contains a complete listing of secondary references. See: Hedlund, J. (2007). Novice teen driving: GDL and beyond. *Journal of Safety Research*, 38(2), 259-266.