



NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

Position/Policy Statement

Graduated Driver Licensing

Comprehensive Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) systems gradually introduce novice drivers to driving in less risky situations and are proven to reduce crashes involving young drivers by up to 40%. The National Safety Council (NSC) encourages states and territories to adopt best practice GDL systems that at a minimum meet the following criteria:

Learner permit Stage

- The minimum entry age to receive a Learner permit should be no younger than 16 years old
- This stage should last for a minimum for 12 months
- All drivers should complete at least 50 (optimally 80-120) hours of supervised driving in all driving conditions, with at least 10 hours at night
- A supervising, licensed adult driver, over the age of 21 must be in the front passenger seat of the vehicle
- All novice drivers, regardless of entry age, should go through the Learner permit stage

Intermediate License Stage

- The minimum entry age should be no younger than 17 years old and should not include exemptions for drivers who have completed driver education courses
- The intermediate license stage should last a minimum of 12 months, regardless of the age at which the driver enters the intermediate license stage
- Unsupervised nighttime driving restrictions should begin as early as 9:00 p.m. and no later than 10:00 p.m., and end no earlier than 5:00 a.m.
- Drivers should have no more than one passenger under 21 years old

Provisions for Both Stages

- Both the Learner permit and intermediate license stages should prohibit all drivers from using all electronic devices while driving. This includes both handheld and hands-free devices.
- All drivers and their passengers should be required to wear seat belts
- Any driver who is cited for a driving infraction in the Learner permit or intermediate license stages should be required to spend an additional 6 months in the particular stage
- There should be zero tolerance for alcohol or illegal drug use for drivers under the age of 21. Alcohol or drug convicted Learner permitted or intermediate license holders should not advance in licensing stage until 21 years old.

- All GDL provisions should be subject to primary enforcement
- Drivers should be required to place a decal on their vehicle indicating their provisional driver status
- GDL systems should apply to all novice drivers regardless of age

Further, NSC encourages the U.S. Congress to provide financial incentives to states that enact comprehensive GDL systems meeting appropriate minimum requirements. NSC also encourages parents to adopt best practices in their homes, regardless of the laws in their states.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens and young adults ages 14 to 24.¹ Per vehicle mile traveled, young and novice drivers' ages 16-19 years old have a fatal crash risk that is approximately three times that of older drivers. Furthermore, this risk is the highest among drivers 16-17 years old, the age at which many teenagers are driving independently for the first time.²

In the last two decades, GDL and driver education have been increasingly recognized by governments, leading traffic safety organizations, and insurance industry representatives as essential safety measures to reduce the elevated crash risk of teen and new drivers.³ The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety provides a GDL "calculator" that allows states to estimate potential reductions in fatal crash rates among 15-17 year olds if they had the most comprehensive provisions found in the U.S. Based on these calculations, potential state crash reductions range from 17% to 63%, saving more than 500 lives each year.⁴

In 2008, NSC adopted a GDL policy position (policy #105) calling on states and U.S. territories to adopt tiered driver licensing systems with specific provisions that gradually introduce novice drivers to the driving environment.⁵ Since that time, research has demonstrated the life-saving impact that more comprehensive GDL components can have on reducing teen driver-related deaths and injuries.⁶ This proposed policy position would replace policy #105 and calls for states to adopt systems that peer-reviewed, scientific evidence demonstrates will save more lives and prevent additional injuries.⁷

Because of the lifesaving and injury prevention aspects of GDL, NSC partnered with the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) in 2014 to develop a new GDL framework. Based on proven or promising evidence, this framework recommends the following best practices in novice driver licensing systems.

Learner Stage

¹ National Safety Council *Injury Facts*, 2016

² Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. (2014c). Teenagers (Fatality Facts). Retrieved from: <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/teenagers/fatalityfacts/teenagers>.

³ A New GDL Framework: Evidence Base to Integrate Novice Driver Strategies http://www.nsc.org/TeenDrivingDocuments/NSC_GDL_Report%20_6.pdf

⁴ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. (2014a). GDL Crash Calculator. Retrieved from: www.iihs.org.

⁵ The tiers are a Learnersstage, a restricted or intermediate stage and unrestricted or a full license.

⁶ A New GDL Framework: Evidence Base to Integrate Novice Driver Strategies http://www.nsc.org/TeenDrivingDocuments/NSC_GDL_Report%20_6.pdf

⁷ Chen, L.-H., Baker, S. P., and Li, G. (2006). Graduated driver licensing programs and fatal crashes of 16-year old drivers: a national evaluation, *Pediatrics*, 118: 56-62.

Minimum entry age. The minimum entry age should be no younger than 16 years old. Studies show that a one-year delay from 15 to 16 years old reduces the fatal crash rate by 13%.⁸ This is consistent with the general finding that beginning to drive at older ages has safety advantages.⁹

Minimum length in Learner stage. The Learner permit stage should be at least 12 months in duration.¹⁰ Increasing the learner period stage to 12 months, while retaining the minimum permit age, would naturally raise the intermediate licensing age to the optimal age of 17 years old in 23 states.¹¹ Requiring twelve months is consistent with the principle of GDL to provide more time for supervised driving practice in the low-risk Learners period. A 12-month Learners period also allows beginners to practice driving under supervision in all seasons.

Supervised driving. The minimum number of supervised driving hours required to progress through GDL should be 50 hours (and optimally 80-120 hours), with a minimum of 10 hours required at night. Currently, 23 states do not meet this standard, instead having requirements between zero and 45 hours. One study found that increased hours of supervised driving are associated with decreases in insurance claims.¹² Another study found an 18% reduction in deaths among 16 year olds when 30 or more hours were required compared with fewer or no hours of practiced driving.¹³ After an extensive review of Australian, European and U.S. literature, researchers concluded that more hours of supervised driving are better.¹⁴

Eligibility age. GDL should apply to all new drivers, regardless of age. One unique characteristic of GDL programs in the United States is that they apply only to those younger than 18 years old in almost all states. Consequently, individuals who start driving at age 18 years old or older may bypass the restrictions of GDL entirely even though there is great benefit to them.

In the United States, only New Jersey applies full GDL rules to novices through age 20, and studies in Australia and Canada indicate that GDL reduces crashes among older novice drivers.¹⁵ Older novice drivers in the U.S. are a significant group, with nationally representative surveys indicating that about 25% of those 18 years old and older have not yet begun the licensing process.¹⁶ It has been estimated that as many as 36% of new drivers in the U.S. will

⁸ McCartt, A. T., Teoh, E. R., Fields, M., Braitman, K. A., and Hellinga, L. A. (2010b). Graduated licensing laws and fatal crashes of teenage drivers: a national study. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 11: 240-248.

⁹ Williams, A. F., McCartt, A. T., Mayhew, D. R., and Watson, B. (2013). Licensing age issues: deliberations from a workshop devoted to this topic. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 14: 237-243.

¹⁰ Masten, S. V., Thomas, F. D., Korbelak, K. T., Blomberg, R. D., et al. (2015). A meta-analysis of graduated driver licensing programs and components in the United States.

¹¹ IIHS http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/laws/gdl_calculator?topicName=teenagers.

¹² Trempel, R. E. (2009). Graduated driver licensing laws and insurance collision claim frequencies of teenage drivers. Arlington VA: Highway Loss Data Institute.

¹³ Chen, L.-H., Baker, S. P., and Li, G. (2006). Graduated driver licensing programs and fatal crashes of 16-year old drivers: a national evaluation, *Pediatrics*, 118: 56-62.

¹⁴ Senserrick, T. M., and Williams, A. F. (2014). Summary of literature on the effective components of graduated licensing schemes for car drivers. Austroads Project SS1707. Draft final report to Austroads, under review, Sydney, NSW. The University of New South Wales.

¹⁵ Mayhew, D. R., Simpson, H. M., and Singhal, D. (2005). Best Practices for Graduated Driver Licensing in Canada. Ottawa, Canada: Traffic Injury Research Foundation.; Healy, D., Catchpole, J., and Harrison, W. (2012). Victoria's graduated licensing system evaluation interim report. Victoria, Australia: VicRoads.

¹⁶ Williams, A. F. (2011). Teenagers' licensing decisions and their views of licensing policies: a national survey. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 12: 312-319.; Tefft, B. C., Williams, A. F., and Grabowski, J. G. (2012). Timing of driver's license acquisition and reasons for delay among young people in the United States, 2012. Washington DC: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

be licensed after their 18th birthday and thus be exempt from most or all GDL requirements beyond the Learner permit stage.¹⁷

A learner permit holding period should be established before fully licensing older adult novice drivers. This time period should provide the new driver with an opportunity to practice driving before advancing to a restricted license and should include zero tolerance requirements for distracted driving and alcohol or drug impaired driving for a period of time. While not fully evaluated, leading transportation experts found enough evidence, no matter what the age of the novice driver, to make the recommendation.¹⁸

Intermediate Stage

Minimum entry age. The minimum entry age should be no younger than 17 years old and should not include exemptions for drivers who have completed driver education courses. Evidence supports delaying licensure for one year (16 to 17 years old), which lowered the fatal crash rate by 13%.¹⁹

Minimum length in intermediate stage. The minimum length of time required to remain in the intermediate stage should be no less than 12 months, regardless of age at the time of entry or type of license being acquired.

The 2014 NSC and TIRF report on GDL, "[A New Framework: Evidence Base to Integrate Novice Driver Strategies](#),"²⁰ notes that while 18 years old is currently the highest minimum exit age for GDL in most of the U.S., many other countries have higher minimum exit ages. Research concludes that it is not necessarily only how old a driver is when he or she is licensed but also how much experience the novice driver has acquired that affects crash risk.²¹

Nighttime driving restrictions. Unsupervised nighttime driving restrictions beginning as early as 9 p.m. and ending no earlier than 5 a.m. should be required for all intermediate drivers.

Late-night driving increases teen risk for fatal crashes.²² This may be attributable to a combination of the visibility challenges caused by dark conditions, slower response time brought about by fatigue, and a lack of experience driving under such conditions.²³ Additionally, alcohol and drug impairment can be a contributing factor, though to a lesser degree than for older drivers.²⁴ Two studies reported maximum benefits to restrict driving beginning at 9 p.m., and a 2013 study supports 10 p.m. or earlier, with a 19% lower crash incidence for 16-year olds.²⁵ The

¹⁷ Tefft, B. C., Williams, A. F., and Grabowski, J. G. (2014). Driver licensing and reasons for delaying licensure among young adults ages 18-20, United States, 2012. *Injury Epidemiology*, 1: 4.

¹⁸ A New GDL Framework: Evidence Base to Integrate Novice Driver Strategies http://www.nsc.org/TeenDrivingDocuments/NSC_GDL_Report%20_6.pdf.

¹⁹ McCartt, A. T., Teoh, E. R., Fields, M., Braitman, K. A., and Hellinga, L. A. (2010b). Graduated licensing laws and fatal crashes of teenage drivers: a national study. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 11: 240-248.

²⁰ A New GDL Framework: Evidence Base to Integrate Novice Driver Strategies http://www.nsc.org/TeenDrivingDocuments/NSC_GDL_Report%20_6.pdf. This report was issued before New Jersey extended its GDL law to 20 years old.

²¹ McCartt AT¹, Mayhew DR, Braitman KA, Ferguson SA, Simpson HM. (2009). Effects of age and experience on young driver crashes: review of recent literature. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, Jun;10(3):209-19.

²² Williams, A. F. (2004). Teenage drivers: patterns of risk. *Journal of Safety Research*, 34: 5-15.

²³ Henk, R., V. Pezoldt, B. Fette. Shedding light on the nighttime driving risk: An analysis of fatal crashes under dark conditions in the U.S., 1999-2008. Teens in the Driver Seat Center, Texas Transportation Institute. (2010).

²⁴ NHTSA. National 2007 Roadside Survey of Alcohol and Drug Use by Drivers.

²⁵ McCartt, A. T., Teoh, E. R., Fields, M., Braitman, K. A., and Hellinga, L. A. (2010b). Graduated licensing laws and fatal crashes of teenage drivers: a national study. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 11: 240-248. Trempel, R. E. (2009).

largest proportion of nighttime motor vehicle fatalities for 16-17 year olds takes place prior to midnight.

Passenger restrictions. With the exception of a supervising driver, intermediate license holders should be limited to transporting no more than one passenger under 21 years old in the vehicle at all times.²⁶

There is clear evidence that having young passengers in cars driven by teenagers increases fatal crash risk. Multiple young passengers – including siblings – increase crash risk the most, but even one young passenger substantially increases risk. In the most recent study, the fatal crash risk per mile traveled quadrupled for 16-17 year old drivers when there were three or more passengers younger than age 21 without supervision in the vehicle, compared with driving alone. However, even having only one young passenger in the vehicle results in a 44% greater risk of driver death in a crash per mile traveled compared with having no passengers.²⁷

Vehicle decals.²⁸ Decals attached to the vehicle of a novice driver to support police enforcement of GDL requirements have been found to be a promising though not comprehensively proven countermeasure in the US.

NSC strongly recommends that states consider requiring vehicle identifiers for all permitted and intermediate license holders to facilitate the enforcement of GDL requirements.

Decals have been used by other countries for decades, including Australia, Canada, France, and Great Britain. These decals are accepted as part of the licensing process, with no reports of negative safety outcomes for novice drivers. Norwegian and Australian researchers have documented the effectiveness of their respective programs.²⁹

In 2010, New Jersey became the first (and only) state in the US requiring the use of decals to identify drivers under 21 years old. Since implementation of the requirement, New Jersey has experienced a sustained decline in intermediate driver crashes. The adjusted crash rate for intermediate drivers was 9.5% lower in the 2-year post-decal period than the 4-year pre-decal period. For several crash types, effects appeared to be particularly strong for 18 and 19 year olds with an estimated 3,197 intermediate drivers' crashes prevented.³⁰ Some have expressed fears that identifying young drivers may lead to profiling and stalking by predators. A report by the NJ Division of Criminal Justice found only one such instance of alleged predatory behavior; however, no charges were subsequently filed. NSC supports efforts to prohibit profiling and strengthen anti-predatory laws as well.³¹

Graduated driver licensing laws and insurance collision claim frequencies of teenage drivers. Arlington VA: Highway Loss Data Institute. Masten, S. V., Foss, R. D., and Marshall, S. W. (2013). Graduated driver licensing program component calibrations and their association with fatal crash involvement, *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 7: 105-113.

²⁶ https://www.aaafoundation.org/sites/default/files/research_reports/2012TeenDriverRiskAgePassengers.pdf

²⁷ Tefft, B. C., Williams, A. F., and Grabowski, J. G. (2013). Teen driver risk in relation to age and number of passengers, United States, 2007-2010. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 14: 283-292.

²⁸ Vehicle decals: there are several types of vehicle decals and identifiers in use around the world. Jurisdictions use transferable stickers, magnets and decals that are velcroed onto license plate. The type of vehicle decal placed into use should be addressed in rule making once a law is passed.

²⁹ http://www.nj.gov/oag/hts/downloads/TDSC_Report_web.pdf pg 19 of the report

³⁰ Allison E. Curry, PhD, MPH, Michael R. Elliott, PhD, Melissa R. Pfeiffer, MPH, Konny H. Kim, MPH, Dennis R. Durbin, MD, MSCE. Long-Term Changes in Crash Rates After Introduction of a Graduated Driver Licensing Decal Provision. *Am J Prev Med* 2014.

³¹ [Kyleigh's Law Interim Report. New Jersey Department of Criminal Justice. April, 2011](#)

As additional states enact decal requirements, it will be important to conduct evaluations to determine whether the positive results in New Jersey are generalizable.

Additional Restrictions for Both Stages

Electronic Device Use. Phone and electronic device use by Learner permit and intermediate license drivers should be prohibited. Teenagers are more susceptible than adults to the risks of cell phone use in vehicles because they lack the driving skills and experience in handling unexpected situations. Based on a study conducted between 2007 and 2015, an average of 59% of teen crashes contained some type of potentially distracting behavior during the six seconds leading up to a crash.³² This study found the driver was engaged in cell phone use in 12% of crashes, visibly using a cell phone (operating/looking) in 9% of all crashes and talking or listening to a cell phone in 3% of all crashes.³³

Seatbelts. Seatbelt use should be required in all seating positions. In 2014, belt use among fatally injured passenger vehicle drivers 16-19 years old was higher than among fatally injured drivers 20-59 years old, 48 percent and 43 percent, respectively, but lower than among drivers 60 years old and older (61 percent). Among fatally injured 16-19 year old occupants, belt use for passengers (36 percent) was considerably lower than drivers in those crashes (46 percent). Note that belt use among those fatally injured is not always accurately recorded, but it gives an indication of relative belt use rates in serious crashes by age group.³⁴

Male teens continue to lag behind female teens in seat belt use. In 2009, 11.5% of high school males said they rarely or never wear a seat belt as a passenger, compared to 7.7% of high school females.³⁵ All states should enact primary seat belt enforcement legislation which allows law enforcement to stop and sanction a novice driver for non-compliance. Teens who live in states with primary enforcement seat belt laws are 12% more likely to buckle up as drivers and 15% more likely to buckle up as passengers compared to teens who reside in states with weaker secondary enforcement seat belt laws.³⁶

Six Month Conviction Free Period. Often referred to as the “contingent advancement” and/or “good behavior” requirement, this provision prevents novice drivers from progressing to the next stage of licensing if they are convicted of a moving or GDL violation. One study of Maryland novice drivers, who, at the time of this study had to remain violation free for a 6 month period before progressing to full licensure, reported that this requirement was associated with a 10% reduction in offenses for 16 year olds (and a non-significant reduction of 5% among 17 year olds).³⁷

Impaired Driving. Alcohol-impaired driving among 16-17 year olds has declined greatly since the 1980s but remains a contributing factor in about 15% of fatal crashes in this age group

³² <https://www.aaafoundation.org/using-naturalistic-driving-data-examine-teen-driver-behaviors-present-motor-vehicle-crashes-2007-0>

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ <http://www.iilhs.org/iilhs/topics/t/teenagers/fatalityfacts/teenagers>

³⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Youth Online: Comprehensive Results 2009. Accessed April 7, 2010.

³⁶ Garcia-Espana JF. Safety Belt Laws and Disparities in Safety Belt Use Among US High School Drivers. American Journal of Public Health. April 19, 2012 (online). - See more at:

http://www.teendriversource.org/stats/support_teens/detail/59#sthash.gU8S49t8.dpuf

³⁷ McKnight AJ, Hyle P, Albrecht L. (1983). *Youth license control demonstration project*. DOT-HS-7-01765. Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service.

during the last decade.³⁸ Zero tolerance and minimum alcohol purchase age laws have contributed to the reduction that has taken place, and there is additional evidence that strengthening night and passenger restrictions would help decrease these fatalities.³⁹

Primary Enforcement. Primary enforcement enables law enforcement officials to stop a vehicle and issue a citation based on a single infraction of the GDL law. Secondary enforcement allows for a GDL citation to be issued only if the driver is pulled over for other infractions. Law enforcement officials report difficulty in enforcing GDL provisions, especially under secondary enforcement. Though no studies specific to the effectiveness of primary enforcement of GDL exist, primary enforcement of other safety laws has proven to be effective.

A study from the University of Alabama found that primary enforcement of distracted driving laws was associated with lower death rates in states with texting laws, but secondary enforcement was not. The study found that the safety effect was greater for young drivers: "Primarily enforced texting laws that banned only young drivers from texting were the most effective at reducing deaths among the 15 to 21 year old cohort, with an associated 11% reduction in traffic fatalities among this age group in states with such bans."⁴⁰

Similarly, experience has shown us that changing from secondary to primary enforcement seat belt laws increases occupant seat belt use.⁴¹ In evaluating Maine's change from secondary to primary enforcement of their seat belt law, observational surveys conducted over an 18-month period after this change went into effect measured increases in seat belt use from 77% to 84% during the daytime and from 69% to 81% at night.⁴²

Federal Incentive Grants. NSC and our advocacy partners have advocated for, and the U.S. Congress has included, federal incentive grants in the last two surface transportation reauthorization bills to provide additional federal funding to states that improve their GDL laws to meet certain minimum criteria. NSC encourages Congress to continue including incentive grants in future highway bills so that states to improve their GDL systems.

PROS & CONS: (Explain strengths and potential challenges to this action.)

Pros:

- Adoption of this policy position will guide the Council's advocacy to improve GDL legislation in the states.

³⁸ Fell, J. C., Todd, M., and Voas, R. (2011b). A national evaluation of nighttime and passenger restriction components of graduated driver licensing. *Journal of Safety Research*, 42: 283-290.

³⁹ Fell, J. C., Todd, M., and Voas, R. (2011b). A national evaluation of nighttime and passenger restriction components of graduated driver licensing. *Journal of Safety Research*, 42: 283-290.; Williams, A. F., West, B. A., and Shults, R. A. (2012b). Fatal crashes of 16- to 17 year old drivers involving alcohol, nighttime driving, and passengers. *Traffic Injury Prevention*, 1-6.

⁴⁰ Alva O. Ferdinand, Nir Menachemi, Bisakha Sen, Justin L. Blackburn, Michael Morrissey, Leonard Nelson. Impact of Texting Laws on Motor Vehicular Fatalities in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 2014; e1 DOI: [10.2105/AJPH.2014.301894](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.301894)

⁴¹ Chaudhary, N. K., Tison, J., & Casanova, T. (2010). Evaluation of Maine's seat belt law change from secondary to primary enforcement (Report No. DOT HS 811 259). Retrieved from the NHTSA website: www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811259.pdf; Masten, S. (2007). The effects of changing to primary enforcement on daytime and nighttime seat belt use. Research note (Report No. DOT HS 810 743).

⁴²Chaudhary, N. K., Tison, J., & Casanova, T. (2010). Evaluation of Maine's seat belt law change from secondary to primary enforcement (Report No. DOT HS 811 259).

- Adoption of this policy position will allow the Council to support legislation mandating decals or extending GDL beyond age 18, legislation the Council's current policy position does not allow us to endorse.
- Adoption of this policy position will allow parents to understand the principles of best practice GDL and enforce GDL in their home, even if their state's laws are not as comprehensive as the recommendations in this policy position.

Cons:

- Many of the recommendations in this policy position are not politically popular, especially the nighttime driving and passenger restrictions.
- Many of the recommended best practices in this policy position could limit the amount of times teenagers can drive themselves to events or transport their siblings, leading to additional transport responsibilities for parents.

This position statement reflects the opinions of the National Safety Council but not necessarily those of each member organization.

Adopted by the National Safety Council, 2016
Supersedes Provisional Driver's Licensing #49, Graduated Driver's Licensing #74, Young Drivers #76, Graduated Driver Licensing #105.