

# DRIVE *for* LIFE

THE NATIONAL SAFE DRIVING TEST & INITIATIVE

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## **DRIVING SAFETY ADVOCATES URGE PARENTS TO REGULATE TEEN DRIVING DURING DEADLY SUMMER MONTHS** *Teen driving, crashes and deaths all spike in summer*

WASHINGTON D.C.--To help reduce the tragic number of summer deaths among new drivers, traffic safety experts today issued a national warning and call-to-action for parents across America to regulate their teens' time on the road more closely this summer. The end of the school year marks the start of the deadliest time of the year for teen drivers -- a time when inexperience behind the wheel turns into loss, injury and death for many youths, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The Summer Safety Challenge was issued today by *Drive for Life*, a public education project of Volvo Cars of North America, AAA, the National Association of Police Organizations and the National Sheriffs' Association, with technical support from NHTSA. *Drive for Life* is in its third year of a nationwide public education effort to improve driving behavior.

Citing that the 101 days from Memorial Day to Labor Day are a time when teen driving, crashes and fatalities all spike, the Summer Safety Challenge urges parents to make more time to supervise their teens' driving, extend the driving privilege gradually, limit passengers and night driving, eliminate distractions and impose strict consequences for safety infractions.

"Many parents take great care to make sure their children drive the safest car possible," said Anne Belec, CEO of Volvo Cars of North America. "This challenge urges parents to spend as much care regulating their children's driving behavior as they do the cars they drive."

A *Drive for Life* review of five years of teen-fatality traffic data from the NHTSA confirms the summer months are the most deadly months of the year for teenagers. Teen deaths increase in May, with 2,568 teen traffic fatalities between 1999 and 2003, and continue to climb throughout the summer, with 2,579 in June. The teen death toll is highest in July and August (2,786 in July and 2,794 in August) during that five-year period. By contrast, 2,029 teenagers died in January and 1,789 teenagers died over the same five-year period in February.

"Each month in summer, we lose the equivalent of an entire high school class on America's roads. Young, inexperienced drivers spend more time behind the wheel in summer, often with tragic results," said Dr. Jeffrey W. Runge, Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration. “Parents must understand the added risk and set limits that can save their young drivers’ lives.”

Teen traffic deaths peak in the summer, when teens log more hours behind the wheel than at any other time of the year. Teen drivers average 44 percent more hours behind the wheel each week during the summer than during the school year, and they are more likely to drive at night – some for the first time – and with multiple passengers.

Traffic crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for 15-20 years olds. Not only do teen drivers have higher death rates than older drivers, even *teen passengers’* death rates exceed those of older passengers.

“Summer is not the time take a vacation from participating in your teen driver’s development,” said Susan Pikrallidas, Vice President of Public Affairs for AAA. “It’s the time to become extra vigilant about when and with whom your child drives.”

Bill Johnson, Executive Director of the National Association of Police Organizations said parents tend to focus on their teen driver, but they also need think about their teen’s safety as a passenger. Almost as many teenage passengers as drivers are killed each year, and according to NHTSA, for every teen who is killed, nine are injured.

“Parents hold the keys to prevention, and the best way to drive home the safety message is to set firm ground rules and lay out the consequences for breaking them,” Juan Cardona, National Traffic Safety Director for the National Sheriffs’ Association.

For tips on how to keep a teen driver safe this summer, including a sample driving contract, visit [www.driveforlife.com](http://www.driveforlife.com). Among the strategies parents can use to improve their children’s chances of staying safe on the road this summer are these:

***Sign a summer contract with their young driver.*** Parents must make it clear that driving is a privilege, not a right. Experts urge parents to clearly define the expectations and requirements associated with being allowed to drive, and the consequences for violating them. Require young drivers to sign a contract accepting the conditions, and stick to them.

***Make time to supervise driving practice.*** Driving is a learned skill acquired with much practice. Teen drivers significantly reduce their risk of crashing if they have logged in at least 50 hours of supervised driving before driving alone. A similar amount of supervised practice is needed before driving alone at night.

***Introduce the driving privilege gradually.*** Allow independent driving only after much practice and for limited amounts of time and in low-traffic situations on familiar roads. Grant other privileges, such as driving for longer periods, on busier roads, at night, in inclement weather, or with passengers later and gradually, as the driver acquires more experience.

***Limit your teen from riding with inexperienced drivers.*** Your child may be in equal or greater danger as a passenger riding with an inexperienced driver. Many teenagers die as passengers in motor vehicles. Fifty-nine percent of teenage passenger deaths in 2003 occurred in vehicles driven by another teenager. Know who is driving your child, what his driving record and experience are, and how his driving privilege is regulated by his parents. Teach your child to be a good passenger, avoiding driver distraction and insisting on safe driving practices.

***Reduce distractions, including limiting passengers.*** Cell phones, radios, cd players, mp3 players, and passengers all can be deadly distractions. Express your expectation that your child not use a cell phone while driving and regulate the use of music players, restricting music entirely for the first six months of independent driving. Research confirms that the already increased crash risk for teen drivers rises with each additional passenger. According to a Johns Hopkins University study, the crash rate is four times higher when there are three or more passengers than when the teen is driving alone. Teens should be permitted to drive passengers (other than a supervising adult) only after much experience and practice. Set ground rules and discuss them with likely passengers.

***Limit nighttime and weekend driving.*** Many teens drive at night for the first time in summer, with the night driving privilege often extended all at once. Treat night driving like the new experience it is and allow independent night driving only after significant supervised night driving. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 42 percent of fatal crashes involving teenagers happened between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. And the later it gets, the greater the chance that alcohol is involved. The Fatality Analysis Reporting System determined the risk of teenage drunk driving fatality is nearly 200 times as great at 1 a.m. Sunday as the risk nine hours later at 10 a.m. Sunday morning. Not surprisingly the risk of crash deaths also increases on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with 54 percent of teenage motor vehicle deaths in 2003 occurring on weekend nights.

***Require your teen to obey the law: Revoke the privilege if they speed, drink and drive.*** Parents must insist their children wear safety belts, whether the child is the driver or a passenger. In general, teenagers are less likely than adults to wear safety belts, and failure to buckle up plays a significant role in teen driving deaths: About two-thirds of teens who are killed in crashes are not buckled up. Safety-belt usage becomes more lax with alcohol consumption. Teen drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2003, 74 percent of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes were *not* wearing safety belts. Teenagers' crashes and violations are more likely to involve speeding than those of older drivers, and most fatal crashes occur at high speed. The thrill seeking associated with immaturity (physical and emotional) can overtake what the driver knows to be the right thing to do. Nearly a third of drivers ages 15 to 20 who were killed in car crashes in 2003 had been drinking.