Traffic Safety Facts

2003 Data

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Young Drivers

There were 194.3 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2002 (2003 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.4 percent (12.5 million) of the total, a 7.0 percent increase from the 11.7 million young drivers in 1992.

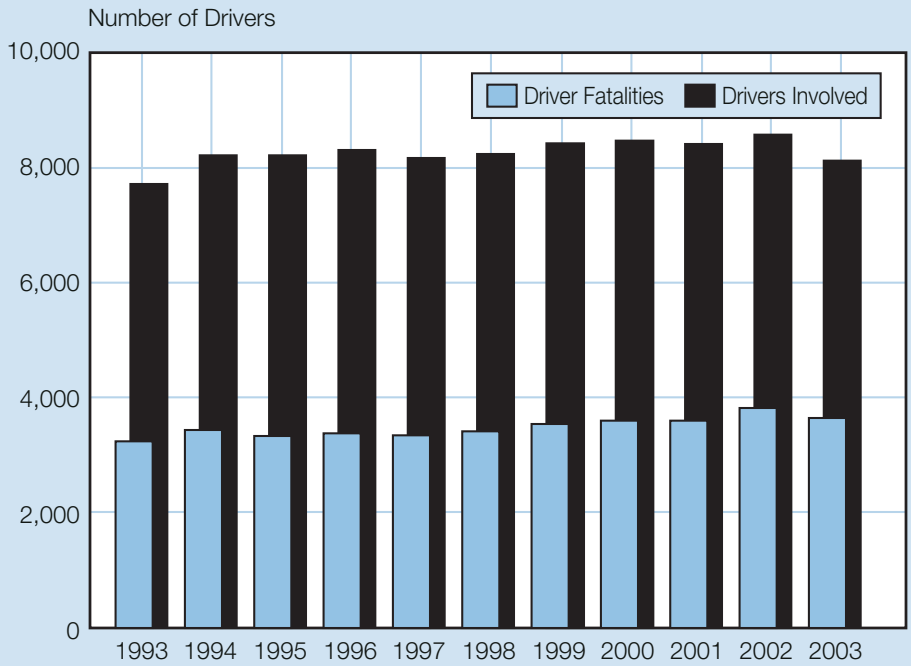
In 2003, 7,884 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes — a 5 percent increase from the 7,484 involved in 1993. Driver fatalities for this age group increased by 13 percent between 1993 and 2003. For young males, driver fatalities rose by 9 percent, compared with a 25 percent increase for young females (Table 1).

"Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people from 15 to 20 years old."

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 2002 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 2003, 3,657 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 308,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

Figure 1

Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old, 1993-2003



NCSA National Center for Statistics & Analysis

"In 2003, 14 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old."

Table 1
Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Fatal Crashes, 1993 and 2003

	1993			2003			Percentage Change, 1993-2003		
							Number		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage Age 15-20
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes									
Total	53,401	7,484	14.0	58,156	7,884	13.6	+9%	+5%	-3%
Male	39,556	5,512	13.9	42,314	5,550	13.1	+7%	+1%	-6%
Female	13,082	1,971	15.1	15,091	2,334	15.5	+15%	+18%	+3%
Driver Fatalities									
Total	23,142	3,228	13.9	26,640	3,657	13.7	+15%	+13%	-1%
Male	17,302	2,417	14.0	19,855	2,643	13.3	+15%	+9%	-5%
Female	5,839	811	13.9	6,780	1,014	15.0	+16%	+25%	+8%

In 2003, 14 percent (7,884) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (58,156) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 18 percent (1,954,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,155,000) were young drivers.

Table 2
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes and Driver Involvement Rates by Age Group, 2003

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
2003 Population (Percent)	8.5	5.7	13.7	15.3	14.0	9.6	3.4	9.0
Drivers Involved in 2003 Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	17.4	13.5	20.2	18.3	13.9	7.8	2.4	6.0
Multi-Vehicle	11.7	9.4	19.3	19.6	16.7	10.4	3.0	9.8
All Fatal Crashes	13.8	10.9	19.6	19.2	15.7	9.4	2.8	8.4
2002 Licensed Drivers* (Percent)	6.4	6.9	18.6	21.3	19.3	12.9	4.4	10.2
Drivers Involved in 2002 Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	66.6	47.4	31.7	26.6	22.8	20.3	18.7	23.8

* 2003 data not available.

Nearly one-third (368) of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had an invalid operator's license at the time of the crash also had a previous license suspension or revocation (Table 3). For the same age group, 31 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2003 had been drinking (Table 4).

Table 3
Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 2003

Driving Record	License Status					
	Valid (6,455)		Invalid (1,314)		Total (7,884)*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,068	17.5	131	11.3	1,199	16.5
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	533	8.3	368	29.9	902	11.7
Previous DWI Convictions	59	0.9	62	5.0	121	1.6
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,484	23.0	216	17.5	1,701	22.1
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	1,186	18.4	254	20.6	1,440	18.7

*Includes 115 drivers with unknown license status.

"During 2003, 254 motorcycle operators 15-20 years old were killed and an additional 8,000 were injured."

Motorcycles

During 2003, 254 young motorcycle operators (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 8,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 37 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,158 motorcyclists of all ages in 2003, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 640 lives could have been saved.

During 2003, 39 percent of the motorcycle drivers between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2003, more than one-third (38 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

Alcohol

A motor vehicle crash is considered to be *alcohol-related* if at least one driver or nonoccupant (such as a pedestrian or pedalcyclist) involved in the crash is determined to have had a Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) of 0.01 gram per deciliter (g/dl) or higher. Thus, any fatality that occurs in an alcohol-related crash is considered an alcohol-related fatality. The term "alcohol-related" does not indicate that a crash or fatality was caused by the presence of alcohol.

In 2003, 25 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes had a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or higher.

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Table 4
Alcohol Involvement Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2003

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01 to 0.07 g/dl	0.08 g/dl or Higher
Surviving	4,227	83	4	13
Fatally Injured	3,657	69	6	25
Total	**7,884**	**76**	**5**	**19**

Table 5
Intoxication Rates Among Young Drivers Fatally Injured in Traffic Crashes by Age, 2003

Age (Years)	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC 0.08 g/dl or Higher
15	86	12
16	442	13
17	614	18
18	855	27
19	845	30
20	815	32

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 2003, 3 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage- only crashes had been drinking, 4 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 24 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

The numbers of drivers 15 to 20 years old involved in fatal crashes who had a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or higher dropped by 6 percent between 1993 and 2003.

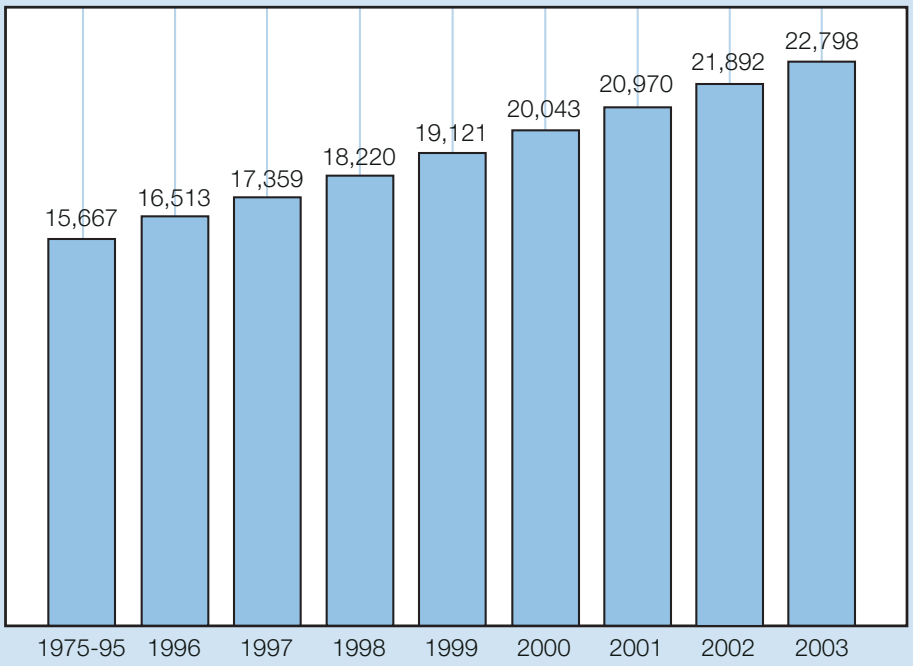
For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 2003, 28 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 13 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2003, 65 percent of the young drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 74 percent were unrestrained.

"NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 22,798 lives since 1975."

All states and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. NHTSA estimates that these laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 22,798 lives since 1975. In 2003, an estimated 906 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws.

Figure 2
Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2003



For more information:

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NPO-101, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. NCSA information can also be obtained by telephone or by fax-on-demand at 1-800-934-8517. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at **http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/ncsa**. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the DOT Vehicle Safety Hotline at 1-888-327-4236.

Other fact sheets available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis are *Overview, Alcohol, Occupant Protection, Older Population, Speeding, Children, Pedestrians, Pedalcyclists, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, School Transportation-Related Crashes, State Traffic Data*, and *State Alcohol Estimates*. Detailed data on motor vehicle traffic crashes are published annually in *Traffic Safety Facts: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System*.