



# Traffic Safety Facts 2002

## Young Drivers



**A Public Information Fact Sheet on Motor Vehicle and Traffic Safety Published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's National Center for Statistics and Analysis**

There were 191.3 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2001 (2002 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.6 percent (12.6 million) of the total, a 5.1 percent increase from the 12.0 million young drivers in 1991.

In 2002, 8,278 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes — a 12 percent increase from the 7,403 involved in 1992. Driver fatalities for this age group increased by 21 percent between 1992 and 2002. For young males, driver fatalities rose by 15 percent, compared with a 42 percent increase for young females (Table 1).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 2000 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 2002, 3,827 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 324,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

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

**Figure 1. Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old, 1992-2002**

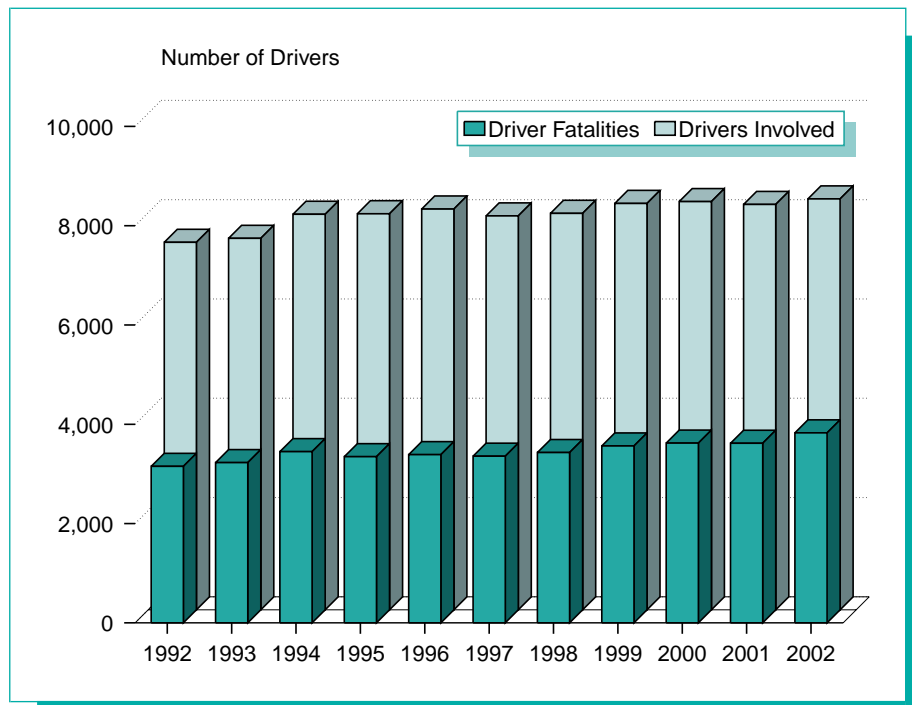


Table 1. Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Fatal Crashes, 1992 and 2002

	1992			2002			Percentage Change, 1992-2002		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Number		Percentage Age 15-20
							Total	Age 15-20	
<i>Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes</i>									
Total	51,901	7,403	14.3	57,803	8,278	14.3	+11%	+12%	0%
Male	38,598	5,509	14.3	42,134	5,823	13.8	+9%	+6%	-3%
Female	12,596	1,893	15.0	14,911	2,455	16.5	+18%	+30%	+10%
<i>Driver Fatalities</i>									
Total	22,584	3,153	14.0	26,549	3,827	14.4	+18%	+21%	+3%
Male	16,946	2,387	14.1	19,773	2,738	13.8	+17%	+15%	-2%
Female	5,636	766	13.6	6,774	1,089	16.1	+20%	+42%	+18%

In 2002, 14 percent (8,278) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (57,803) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 16 percent (1,825,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,146,000) were young drivers.

**“In 2002, 14 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”**

Table 2. Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes and Driver Involvement Rates by Age Group, 2002

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
2002 Population (Percent)	8.5	5.6	13.8	15.6	13.9	9.2	3.3	9.0
Drivers Involved in 2002 Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	18.5	13.5	20.7	18.0	13.4	7.4	2.3	5.7
Multi-Vehicle	12.2	9.6	19.7	19.9	15.9	9.8	3.1	9.8
All Fatal Crashes	14.6	11.1	20.1	19.2	15.0	8.9	2.8	8.2
2001 Licensed Drivers* (Percent)	6.6	6.8	18.9	21.7	19.3	12.3	4.4	10.0
Drivers Involved in 2001 Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	64.8	46.2	32.1	27.1	22.6	20.0	19.3	25.2

\* 2002 data not available.

In 2002, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old was \$40.8 billion.

Nearly one-third (412) 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, 29 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2002 had been drinking (Table 4).

**Table 3. Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 2002**

Driving Record	License Status					
	Valid (6,773)		Invalid (1,410)		Total (8,278)*	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,168	18.2	172	14.1	1,342	17.5
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	542	8.0	412	31.5	954	11.8
Previous DWI Convictions	73	1.1	73	5.6	146	1.8
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,610	23.8	246	18.8	1,858	23.0
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	1,210	17.9	271	20.7	1,481	18.3

\*Includes 95 drivers with unknown license status.

### Motorcycles

During 2002, 215 young motorcycle operators (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 9,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 29 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 692 motorcyclists of all ages in 2002, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 449 lives could have been saved.

During 2002, 45 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 2002, nearly one-half (49 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

### Alcohol

*In 2001, NHTSA began using a revised method — **multiple imputation** — to estimate missing information about blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels for persons involved in fatal crashes. The alcohol estimates in this fact sheet are based on the new imputation method. More information on the new multiple imputation method, including detailed tabulations of alcohol involvement in various categories (age, sex, time of day, etc.), is available in NHTSA Technical Report DOT HS 809 403, Transitioning to Multiple Imputation: A New Method to Estimate Missing Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) Values in FARS.*

NHTSA defines a fatal traffic crash as being *alcohol-related* if either a driver or a nonoccupant (e.g., pedestrian) had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.01 grams per deciliter (g/dl) or greater in a police-reported traffic crash. Persons with a BAC of 0.08 g/dl or greater involved in fatal crashes are considered to be *intoxicated*. This is the legal limit of intoxication in most states.

**“During 2002, 215 motorcycle operators 15-20 years old were killed and an additional 9,000 were injured.”**

In 2002, 24 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.

**Table 4. Alcohol Involvement Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2002**

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01-0.07 g/dl	≥0.08 g/dl
Surviving	4,451	83	5	12
Fatally Injured	3,827	71	6	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,278</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>17</b>

**Table 5. Intoxication Rates Among Young Drivers Fatally Injured in Traffic Crashes by Age, 2002**

Age (Years)	Number of Drivers	Percentage Intoxicated (BAC ≥0.08 g/dl)
15	104	12
16	514	13
17	671	14
18	829	24
19	894	29
20	815	33

***“In 2002, 24 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.”***

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 2002, 2 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 23 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

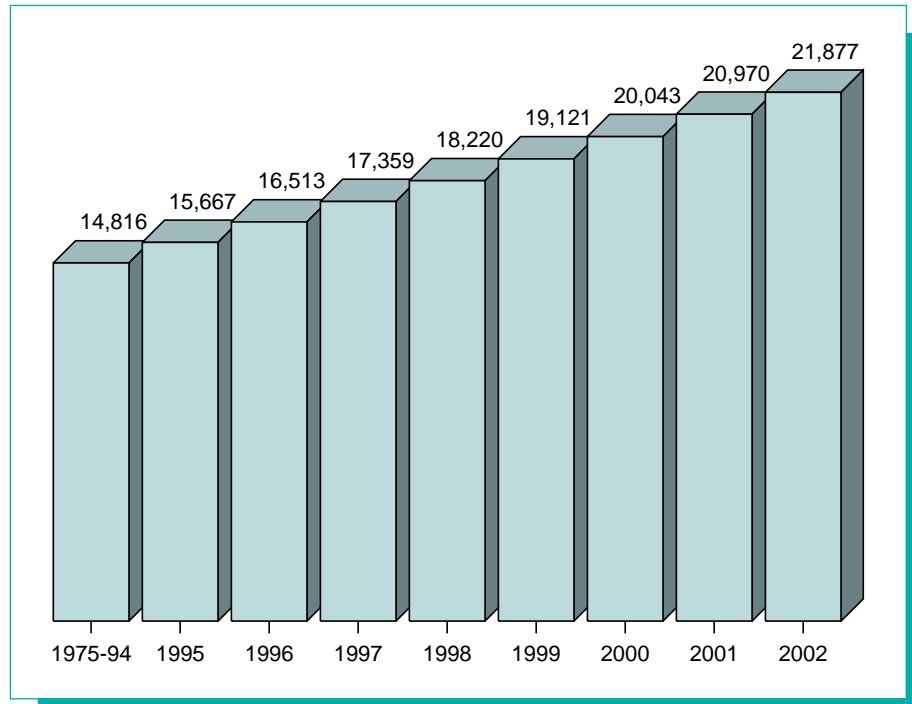
The numbers of drivers 15 to 20 years old involved in fatal crashes who were intoxicated dropped by 7 percent between 1992 and 2002.

For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 2002, 27 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 11 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2002, 69 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, 77 percent were unrestrained.

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 21,887 lives since 1975. In 2002, an estimated 917 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws.

**Figure 2. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2002**



**“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 21,887 lives since 1975.”**

**For more information:**

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NPO-121, 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-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/nca>. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.

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*.