

Traffic Safety Facts 1996

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration



Young Drivers



There were 177.4 million licensed drivers in the United States in 1995 (1996 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.7 percent (11.9 million) of the total, an 11 percent decrease from the 13.4 million young drivers in 1985.

In 1996, 8,054 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes — a 23 percent decrease from the 10,470 involved in 1986. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 27 percent between 1986 and 1996. For young males, driver fatalities dropped by 34 percent, compared with a 4 percent decrease for young females (Table 3).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 1993 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 1996, 3,387 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 373,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

In 1996, 14 percent (8,054) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (56,793) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 16 percent (1,914,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (12,173,000) were young drivers.

“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, 1986-1996

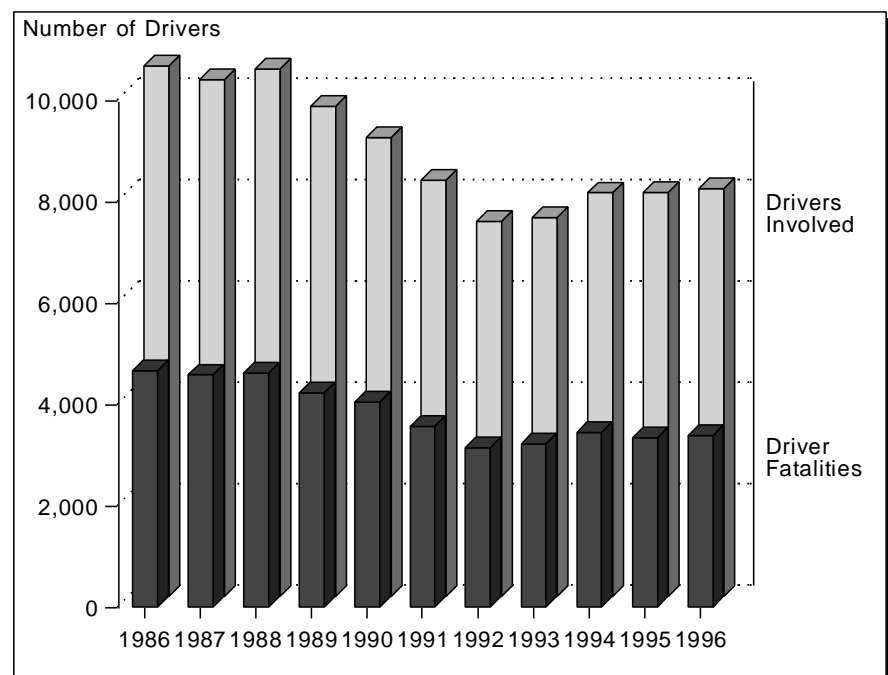


Table 1. Drivers Involved in 1996 Fatal Crashes by Age Group and 1995 Driver Involvement Rates

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
1996 Population (Percent)	8.4	5.3	15.2	16.4	12.2	8.0	3.7	9.0
Drivers Involved in 1996 Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	18.5	13.4	24.0	18.3	10.8	6.2	2.6	5.8
Multi-Vehicle	12.1	9.7	22.4	20.3	13.8	8.3	3.3	9.8
All Fatal Crashes	14.4	11.1	23.0	19.6	12.7	7.6	3.1	8.3
1995 Licensed Drivers* (Percent)	6.7	7.5	22.2	22.2	16.4	10.8	4.9	9.3
Drivers Involved in 1995 Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	67.0	47.1	33.0	27.1	23.4	21.2	19.1	27.9

* 1996 data not available.

“In 1996, 14 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”

Almost one-third 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. For the same age group, almost 30 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 1996 had been drinking (Table 4).

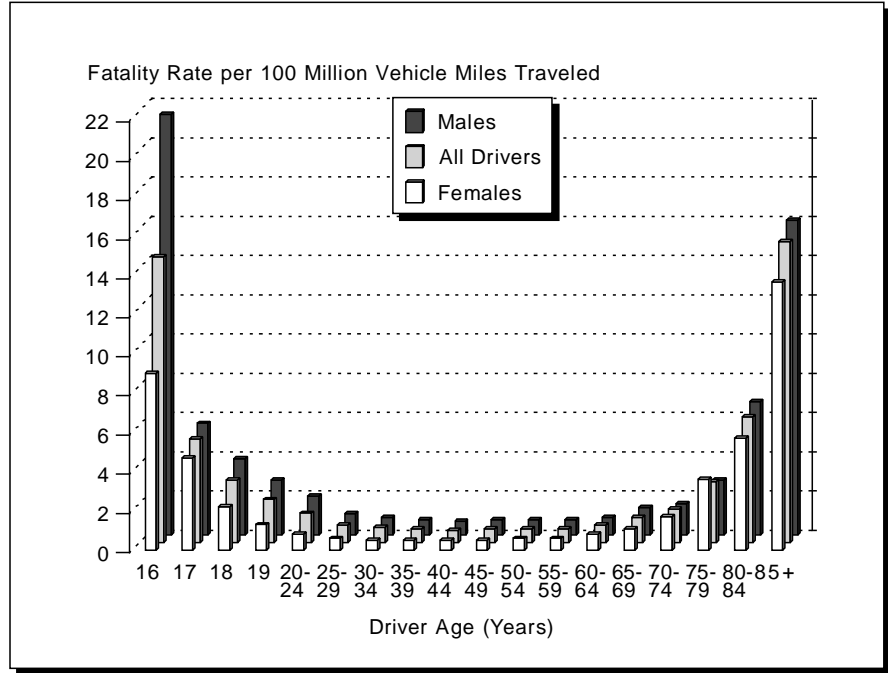
Table 2. Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 1996

Driving Record	License Status					
	Valid (6,858)		Invalid (1,159)		Total (8,017)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,427	20.8	184	15.9	1,611	20.1
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	438	6.4	375	32.4	813	10.1
Previous DWI Convictions	62	0.9	62	5.3	124	1.5
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,636	23.9	202	17.4	1,838	22.9
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Convictions	1,213	17.7	227	19.6	1,440	18.0

In 1996, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old was \$32.3 billion.

When driver fatality rates are calculated on the basis of estimated annual travel, the highest rates are found among the youngest and oldest drivers. Compared with the fatality rate for drivers 25 to 65 years old, the rate for teenage drivers is about 4 times as high, and the rate for drivers in the oldest group is 17 times as high.

Figure 2. Driver Fatality Rates by Age and Sex, 1994



“The fatality rate for teenage drivers, based on estimated annual travel, is about 4 times as high as the rate for drivers 25 to 65 years old.”

Young female drivers, under age 50, have a lower fatality rate than their male counterparts, on a per mile driven basis, while the rate is essentially the same for both male and female drivers over 50 years of age.

Table 3. Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Fatal Crashes, 1986 and 1996

	1986			1996			Percentage Change, 1986-1996		
	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	60,335	10,470	17.4	56,793	8,054	14.2	-6%	-23%	-18%
Male	46,653	8,097	17.4	41,223	5,779	14.0	-12%	-29%	-20%
Female	12,744	2,373	18.6	14,798	2,274	15.4	+16%	-4%	-17%
<i>Driver Fatalities</i>									
Total	26,630	4,658	17.5	24,456	3,387	13.8	-8%	-27%	-21%
Male	20,943	3,680	17.6	17,822	2,444	13.7	-15%	-34%	-22%
Female	5,683	978	17.2	6,632	942	14.2	+17%	-4%	-17%

Motorcycles

During 1996, 212 young motorcycle drivers (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 7,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 29 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 490 motorcyclists of all ages in 1996, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 279 lives could have been saved.

During 1996, 51 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 1996, more than one-quarter (29 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

Alcohol

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 0.10 g/dl or greater involved in fatal crashes are considered to be *intoxicated*. This is the legal limit of intoxication in most states.

In 1996, 21 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, 1996

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage With BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01-0.09 g/dl	≥0.10 g/dl
Surviving	4,667	84.6	7.0	8.4
Fatally Injured	3,387	70.8	7.9	21.3
Total	8,054	78.8	7.4	13.8

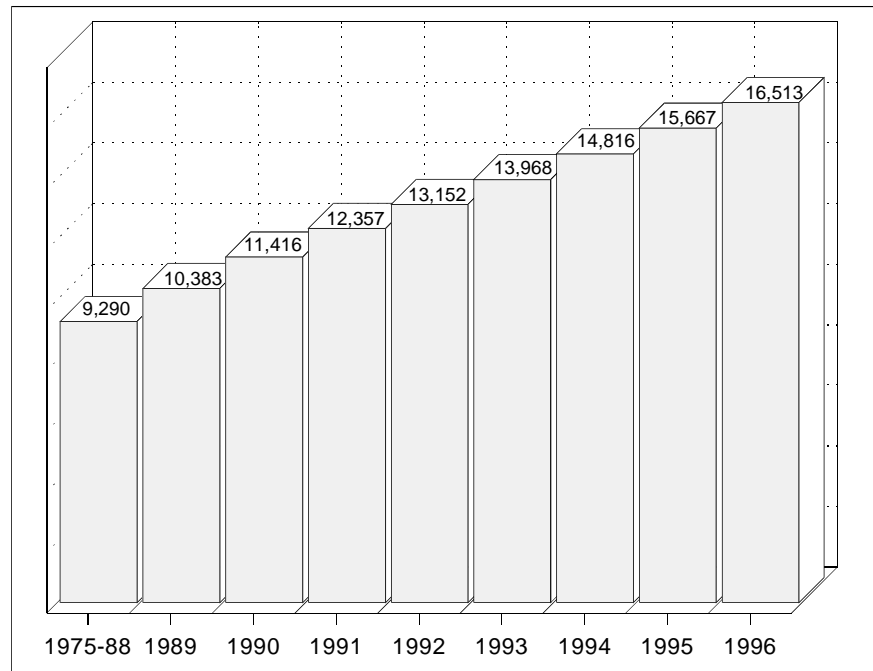
The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 1996, 2 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 3 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 21 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

In both the categories of drivers killed and drivers involved in fatal crashes, the numbers of drivers 15 to 20 years old who were intoxicated dropped by 54 percent between 1986 and 1996 — the largest declines of any age group.

“In 1996, 21 percent of the young drivers who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.”

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 16,513 lives since 1975. Thirteen states have set 0.08 g/dl as the legal intoxication limit, and 43 states plus the District of Columbia have zero tolerance laws for drivers under the age of 21 (that is, drivers under 21 with BAC levels above 0.02 g/dl are considered to be legally intoxicated by the state).

Figure 3. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-1996



“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 16,513 lives since 1975.”

For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 1996, 25 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 12 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 1996, 76 percent of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 81 percent were unrestrained.

For more information:

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. Telephone inquiries should be addressed to Ms. Louann Hall 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/nscsa>. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.