

Young Drivers

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds.”

There were 202.8 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2006. Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.4 percent (13.0 million) of the total, a 7.2-percent increase from the 12.1 million young drivers in 1996.

In 2006, 7,463 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes – an 8-percent decrease from the 8,074 involved in 1996. Driver fatalities for this age group increased by 3 percent between 1996 and 2006. For young males, driver fatalities rose by 5 percent, compared with a 3-percent decrease for young females (Table 1).

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds (based on 2004 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 2006, 3,490 15- to 20-year-old drivers were killed and an additional 272,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes.

Figure 1
Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers, 1996-2006

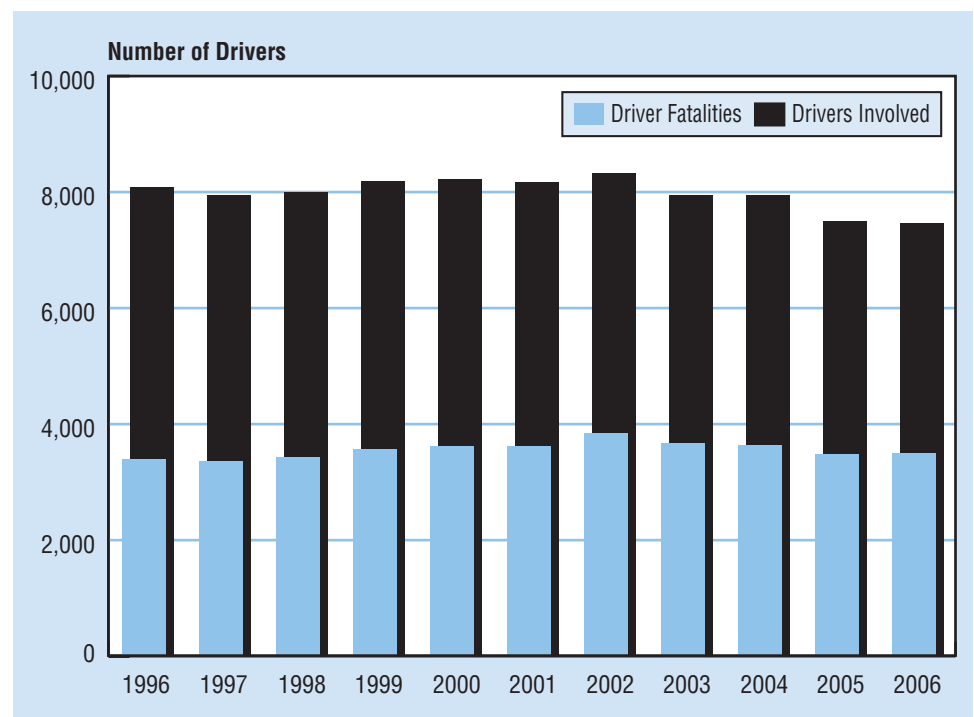


Table 1
Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes, 1996 and 2006

	1996			2006			Percentage Change, 1996-2006		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes									
Total	57,001	8,074	14.2	57,695	7,463	12.9	1	-8	-8.7
Male	41,376	5,797	14.0	41,975	5,361	12.8	1	-8	-8.8
Female	14,850	2,276	15.3	14,655	2,093	14.3	-1	-8	-6.8
Driver Fatalities									
Total	24,534	3,389	13.8	27,323	3,490	12.8	11	3	-7.5
Male	17,875	2,446	13.7	20,656	2,567	12.4	16	5	-9.2
Female	6,657	942	14.2	6,569	914	13.9	-1	-3	-1.7

Note: Excluding unknown ages.

“In 2006, 12.9 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”

In 2006, 12.9 percent (7,463) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (57,695) were young drivers age 15 to 20 years old, and 16 percent (1,621,000) of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes (10,558,000) were young drivers.

Table 2
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes and Driver Involvement Rates by Age Group, 2006

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
2006 Population (Percent)	8.5	5.7	13.5	14.6	14.5	10.6	3.5	9.0
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)	16.5	14.0	20.5	17.2	14.6	9.1	2.4	5.5
- Single-Vehicle								
- Multi-Vehicle	11.1	9.8	19.4	18.8	17.3	11.1	3.4	8.9
- All Fatal Crashes	13.2	11.4	19.8	18.2	16.3	10.4	3.0	7.5
2006 Licensed Drivers (Percent)	6.4	6.8	17.5	19.7	20.0	14.8	4.7	10.2
2006 Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	57.5	46.8	31.6	25.8	22.7	19.6	17.9	20.7

Note: Excluding unknown ages.

Among 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2006, 28 percent (378) of those who did not have valid operator's licenses at the time of the crash also had previous license suspensions or revocations (Table 3). For the same age group, 31 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 2006 had been drinking (Table 4).

Table 3

Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 2006

Driving Record	License Status				Total (7,463)*	
	Valid (5,972)		Invalid (1,368)			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	840	14.1	119	8.7	960	12.9
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	489	8.2	378	27.6	868	11.6
Previous DWI Convictions	68	1.1	60	4.4	128	1.7
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,277	21.4	207	15.1	1,484	19.9
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	981	16.4	251	18.3	1,235	16.5

*Includes 123 drivers with unknown license status.

Note: Excluding all drivers with unknown previous records.

“During 2006, 318 15- to 20-year-old motorcycle operators were killed and an additional 8,000 were injured.”

Motorcycles

During 2006, 318 young motorcycle operators (15 to 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 1,658 motorcyclists of all ages in 2006, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 752 lives could have been saved.

During 2006, 38 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 2006, more than one-third (42%) 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 .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 2006, 25 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 years old) who were killed in crashes had a BAC of .08 g/dL or higher.

Table 4

Alcohol Involvement Among 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2006

Driving Status	Percentage with BAC			
	Number of Drivers	.00 g/dL	.01 to .07 g/dL	.08 or Higher g/dL
1996				
Surviving	4,685	83	5	12
Fatally Injured	3,389	70	6	25
Total	8,074	78	5	17
2006				
Surviving	3,973	84	4	12
Fatally Injured	3,490	69	6	25
Total	7,463	77	5	18

“In 2006, 25 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 years old) who were killed in crashes had a BAC of .08 g/dL or higher.”

Table 5

Intoxication Rates Among Young Drivers Fatally Injured in Traffic Crashes by Age, 2006

Age	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC .08 g/dL or Higher
15	84	17
16	341	16
17	567	19
18	827	23
19	837	28
20	834	33

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 2006, 5 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 6 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 23 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

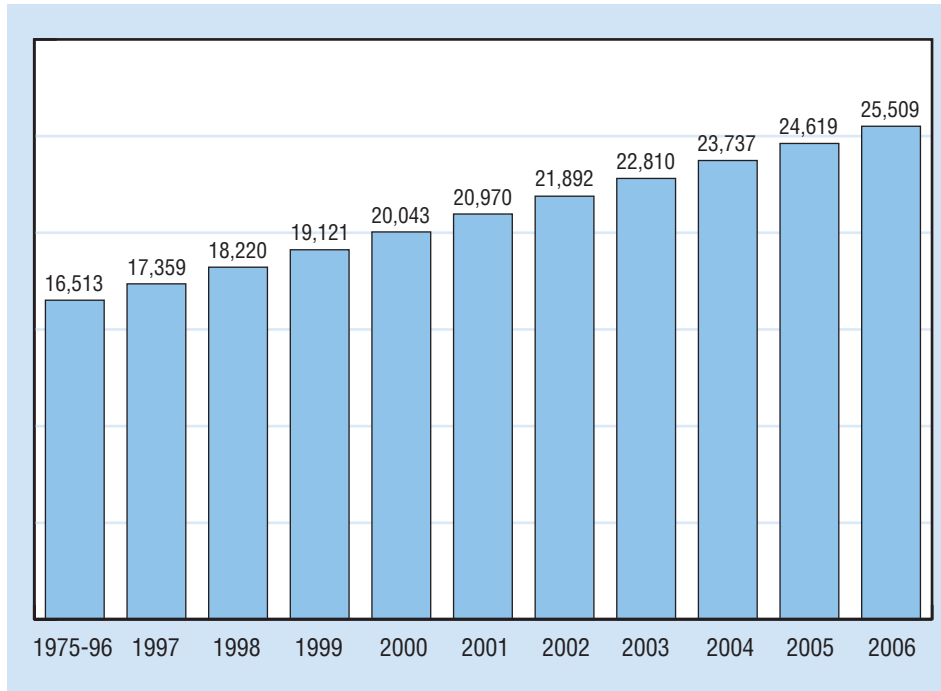
The percentage of 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had a BAC of .08 g/dL or higher dropped by 7 percent between 1996 and 2006.

For young drivers (15 to 20 years old), alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 2006, 27 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 15 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2006, 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, 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 25,509 lives since 1975. In 2006, an estimated 890 lives were saved by minimum drinking age laws.

Figure 2
Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2006



“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 25,509 lives since 1975.”

For more information:

Information on traffic fatalities is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NVS-421, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590. NCSA can be contacted on 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 www.nhtsa.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/nca. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Vehicle Safety Hotline at 888-327-4236.

Other fact sheets available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis are *Overview, Alcohol, African American, Bicyclists and Other Cyclists* (formerly titled *Pedalcyclists*), *Children, Hispanic, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, Occupant Protection, Older Population, Pedestrians, Race and Ethnicity, Rural/Urban Comparisons, School Transportation-Related Crashes, Speeding, State Alcohol Estimates, and State Traffic Data*. 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*. The fact sheets and annual Traffic Safety Facts report can be accessed online at www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/CMSWeb/index.aspx.

Table 6
Fatalities in Crashes Involving Young Drivers (Ages 15-20) by State and Fatality Type, 2006

State	Young Drivers	Passengers in Young Driver's Vehicle	Occupants of Other Vehicles	Nonoccupants	Total
Alabama	110	79	57	11	257
Alaska	3	5	3	5	16
Arizona	95	79	44	24	242
Arkansas	66	29	31	7	133
California	288	225	194	89	796
Colorado	47	31	25	6	109
Connecticut	34	12	15	2	63
Delaware	6	7	7	3	23
Dist of Columbia	2	2	1	0	5
Florida	248	122	164	84	618
Georgia	131	85	83	16	315
Hawaii	8	11	4	1	24
Idaho	26	15	11	3	55
Illinois	114	79	57	14	264
Indiana	89	45	46	11	191
Iowa	45	15	29	2	91
Kansas	46	15	20	2	83
Kentucky	82	37	49	5	173
Louisiana	75	48	51	19	193
Maine	23	17	8	0	48
Maryland	49	25	20	18	112
Massachusetts	33	20	13	6	72
Michigan	70	45	60	21	196
Minnesota	47	32	30	4	113
Mississippi	75	45	48	6	174
Missouri	119	79	51	10	259
Montana	21	13	6	2	42
Nebraska	37	19	19	2	77
Nevada	28	16	19	6	69
New Hampshire	11	4	3	2	20
New Jersey	49	33	22	17	121
New Mexico	24	31	9	12	76
New York	97	65	58	24	244
North Carolina	113	89	78	20	300
North Dakota	15	6	3	0	24
Ohio	103	70	53	16	242
Oklahoma	61	38	36	6	141
Oregon	36	18	11	7	72
Pennsylvania	135	61	68	22	286
Rhode Island	5	5	3	1	14
South Carolina	71	38	44	21	174
South Dakota	20	11	7	1	39
Tennessee	116	71	50	10	247
Texas	298	181	167	55	701
Utah	33	17	11	5	66
Vermont	12	2	0	0	14
Virginia	91	58	36	10	195
Washington	59	43	22	8	132
West Virginia	37	21	16	0	74
Wisconsin	74	40	30	7	151
Wyoming	13	11	6	1	31
U.S. Total	3,490	2,165	1,898	624	8,177
Puerto Rico	40	21	10	16	87