

3 Most Common Errors That Lead to Teen Drivers' Crashes

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Teen drivers get into serious accidents at a high rate because they fail to scan for possible hazards, go too fast for road conditions, or become distracted by something inside or outside their cars.

A recent study by The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm Insurance Companies hones in on the most common errors teen drivers make that lead to a serious crash.

Teen drivers are involved in fatal crashes at four times the rate of adults, according to the study, which was published in the journal, *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.

Researchers analyzed more than 800 crashes involving teen drivers and identified a few common "critical errors" that are often one of the last in a chain of events leading up to a crash. Seventy-five percent of these crashes were due a critical teen driver error, with three common errors accounting for nearly half of all serious crashes.

Among crashes with a teen driver error:

- Twenty-one percent occurred due to lack of scanning that is needed to detect and respond to hazards.
- Twenty-one percent occurred due to going too fast for road conditions, (for example, driving too fast to respond to others, or to successfully navigate a curve).
- Twenty percent occurred due to being distracted by something inside or outside the vehicle.

The researchers said that environmental conditions, such as poor weather, vehicle malfunction, aggressive driving, or physical impairments such as drowsy driving were not primary factors in most crashes.

"This study helps dispel the myth that most teen crashes are due to aggressive driving or thrill-seeking," said Allison Curry, Ph.D., lead author and a researcher at The Children's Hospital's Center for Injury Research and Prevention. "Promoting safe driving skills is as important as preventing problem behaviors."

The authors say that by getting specific about the types of teen driver errors that are most likely to precede a crash, the study makes it possible to target programs, driver education and other strategies to reduce those critical errors and prevent crashes from happening.

"Laws and policies that address distractions by limiting the number of peer passengers and prohibiting cell phone use among novice drivers will help reduce crash rates, but will only address part of the problem," said study co-author Dennis Durbin, MD, MSCE, who co-directs CIRP. "Many crashes will still occur due to the inability of teen drivers to detect and respond to a hazard in time. Formal teen driver training and parent-teen practice drives should focus on building scanning and hazard awareness skills."

Scanning involves observing the surroundings far ahead of the vehicle and side-to-side, not just immediately in front of the hood. It is a higher-level skill that experienced drivers develop over time. The study authors note that developing effective ways to teach this skill sooner in the learning-to-drive process could reduce teen crash risk. Pilot tests of this type of training have shown promise in increasing hazard detection and response skills among novice drivers.

"This research gets us one step closer to understanding why teens crash and what we can do to help prevent future crashes," said Cindy Garretson, director of Auto Technology Research at State Farm, who urged graduated driver licensing laws, along with educational programs that are focused on common teen driver errors.