

# Issue Brief

## Recent Studies, Statistics on Graduated Driver License Standards Reveal Fewer Teen Auto Fatalities

By Tami Stanton  
NAMIC State Affairs Manager – Central Region

### Background

During the mid-1990s, state lawmakers began enacting graduated driver license (GDL) laws in an attempt to curb the number one killer of teenagers in the United States – motor vehicle accidents.<sup>1</sup>

Since then, 47 states and the District of Columbia have enacted in one form or another all three stages of GDL laws that allow teenagers to gradually receive full driving privileges. The three basic phases are:

- a supervised learners' license period;
- an intermediate license, which allows unsupervised driving depending on various situations; and
- a full privilege license.

Arizona, Kansas, and North Dakota do not have an intermediate licensing stage in their laws, and no state has the optimal GDL system recommended by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS).<sup>2</sup>

Almost immediately after states began passing GDL laws, numerous sources and studies began to show that GDL programs were reducing teen fatalities.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), for example, reported that “studies of GDL programs comparing rates before and after GDL implementation in individual states have reported reduction in fatal crash rates of novice drivers that ranged from 11 percent to 32 percent.”<sup>3</sup>

Newer studies released this year not only illustrate that GDL programs work in saving teen lives, but which GDL program elements are most effective in protecting teenage drivers from accidents. Additionally, a nationwide public poll indicates strong support for such GDL programs.

### Recent Studies

Graduated driver licensing programs reduce by 11 percent on average the incidence of fatal crashes among 16-year-old drivers, according to a June 2006 study released by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.<sup>4</sup> Although the effectiveness of GDL programs previously had been proven, the Johns Hopkins study

illustrated which GLD components had the greatest impact on saving lives.

Researchers used 1994-2004 data from NHTSA's Fatality Analysis Reporting System and examined fatal crashes in 36 states with GDL programs and in seven states that did not. They found that in states with six or seven of the basic provisions, the fatal crash reduction was 21 percent. The basic provisions include:

- A minimum age of 15-1/2 for obtaining a learner permit;
- A waiting period after obtaining a learner permit of at least 3 months before applying for an intermediate license;
- A minimum of 30 hours of supervised driving;
- Minimum age of at least 16 years for obtaining an intermediate state license;
- Minimum age of at least 17 years for full licensing;
- A nighttime driving restriction; and
- A restriction on carrying passengers.

The study also found a 16 percent to 21 percent reduction in fatal crashes when GDL programs included an age requirement in addition to a three-month wait before teens could apply for their intermediate-stage license, a nighttime driving restriction and either 30 hours of supervised driving or passenger restrictions.

Clearly, as stated by the NHTSA, "this study strongly underscores the effectiveness of graduated licensing laws" and provides extremely valuable information to states searching for "solutions to the tragic problem of fatal crashes involving teenagers."<sup>5</sup>

The IIHS has developed a similar approach<sup>6</sup> in evaluating the state licensing systems for teen drivers. Utilizing a point system based on the key components of graduated licensing, the IIHS graded each state's system as good, fair, marginal or poor.

A June 2006 study released by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety<sup>7</sup> also showed fatality and injury crash rates for 16-year-old drivers were 20 percent lower in a state with nighttime and passenger GDL restrictions than in another comparable jurisdiction that lacked the GDL provisions.

For this study, the Traffic Injury Research Foundation compared crash rates and crash patterns

of teenage drivers in Oregon that has nighttime and passenger restrictions during the intermediate stage of GDL with those in Ontario, Canada whose GDL program did not include such restrictions.

Not only does the statistical evidence continue to mount in support of GDL programs, but so does public support. A national Gallup Organization poll<sup>8</sup> released by Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Nationwide Insurance in April 2006 showed 81 percent of the respondents supported graduated driver's licensing for teens, up from 76 percent in 2000.

## Conclusion

Graduated driver licensing programs have proven to be effective in reducing the risk of vehicle crashes among teen drivers. They have also been shown to be popular with the public. With the release of the recent studies, state lawmakers now know which specific GDL programs are most effective.

NAMIC looks forward to working with legislators throughout the country to enact these proven GDL provisions and making the roads safer for everyone.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2002, the latest year for which data are available, motor vehicle crashes were the leading cause of death among 13- to 19-year-old males and females in the United States (6,007 deaths). For more information, see [www.iihs.org/research/fatality\\_facts/pdfs/teenagers.pdf](http://www.iihs.org/research/fatality_facts/pdfs/teenagers.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>Information about the IIHS study can be found on the Insurance Information Institute web site at: [www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/teendrivers/](http://www.iii.org/media/hottopics/insurance/teendrivers/).

<sup>3</sup>The NHTSA report can be found at: [http://nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/Communication%20&%20Consumer%20Information/GDL\\_6-20-2006.pdf](http://nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/Communication%20&%20Consumer%20Information/GDL_6-20-2006.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>The Johns Hopkins study was supported by the NHTSA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More details can be found at: [www.jhsph.edu/publichealthnews/press\\_releases/2006/baker\\_gdl.html](http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealthnews/press_releases/2006/baker_gdl.html).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Each state's evaluation information is available online at the IIHS web site: [www.iihs.org/laws/state\\_laws/grad\\_license.html](http://www.iihs.org/laws/state_laws/grad_license.html).

<sup>7</sup>More information about the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety Foundation study can be found at: [www.aaafoundation.org/multimedia/index.cfm?button=red uceteencrashes](http://www.aaafoundation.org/multimedia/index.cfm?button=red uceteencrashes).

<sup>8</sup> See, "*Underage Drinking in America*," a MADD and Nationwide Insurance Survey, released April 20, 2006, The Gallup Organization (Princeton, NJ: 2005), p.19.