



Young Drivers

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds (based on 2007 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics).

There were 208.3 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2008 (2009 data not available). Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.4 percent (13.3 million) of the total, a 5.1-percent increase from the 12.7 million young drivers in 1999.

In 2009, 2,336 15- to 20-year-old drivers were killed, which decreased by 15 percent from 2,742 in 2008. Additionally 196,000 15- to 20-year-old drivers were injured in motor vehicle crashes in 2009, which decreased by 14 percent from 228,000 in 2008.

In 2009, 5,148 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes – a 37-percent decrease from the 8,224 involved in 2000. In this age group, driver fatalities declined by 35 percent between 2000 and 2009. For 15- to 20-year-old young males, driver fatalities decreased by 36 percent, compared with a 33-percent decrease for young females (Table 1). Total drivers involved in fatal crashes decreased by 21 percent from 57,280 in 2000 to 45,230 in 2009.

In the 15- to 20-year-old age group, driver fatalities declined by 35 percent between 2000 and 2009.

Figure 1
Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers 15- to 20-Years Old, 2000-2009

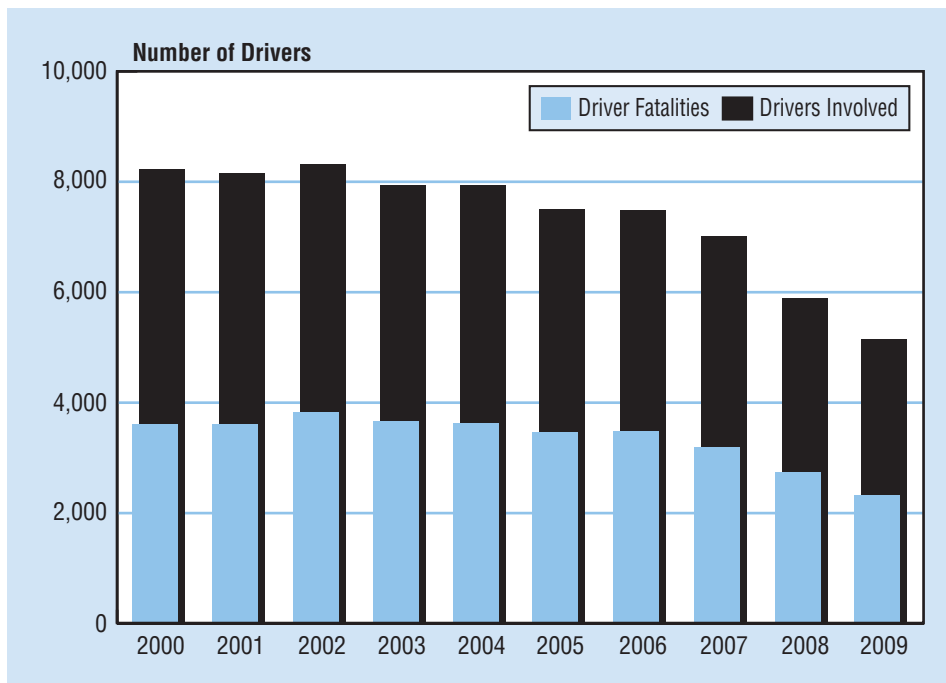


Table 1

Involvement of 15- to 20-Year-Old Drivers in Fatal Crashes, by Gender, 2000 and 2009

Gender	2000			2009			Percentage Change, 2000-2009	
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes								
Total	57,280	8,224	14.4	45,230	5,148	11.4	-21	-37
Male	41,795	5,872	14.0	32,807	3,589	10.9	-22	-39
Female	14,790	2,352	15.9	11,825	1,558	13.2	-20	-34
Driver Fatalities								
Total	25,567	3,621	14.2	21,798	2,336	10.7	-15	-35
Male	18,939	2,641	13.9	16,678	1,682	10.1	-12	-36
Female	6,627	980	14.8	5,115	654	12.8	-23	-33

Note: Total includes unknown gender.

In 2009, 11 percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.

The recent two-year comparison of total drivers involved in fatal crashes decreased by 10 percent from 50,416 in 2008 to 45,230 in 2009. Out of those, young drivers ages 15 to 20 were 5,148 in 2009, this decreased by 13 percent from 5,886 in 2008.

In 2009, 11 percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes were young drivers ages 15 to 20 years old, and 14 percent of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes were young drivers.

Total drivers involved in police-reported crashes – 9,614,000 in 2009 – decreased by 5 percent from 10,081,000 in 2008. Out of those, 1,337,000 were young drivers ages 15 to 20 in 2009, 6 percent decrease from 1,429,000 in 2008.

Table 2

Population and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, by Age Group, 2009

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
Population (Percent)	8.4	5.6	13.5	13.5	14.5	11.3	3.8	9.1
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
- All Fatal Crashes	11.6	10.3	19.3	17.4	17.2	11.8	3.7	8.5
- Single-Vehicle	14.0	12.3	20.6	16.4	16.0	10.7	3.3	6.5
- Multi-Vehicle	9.9	9.0	18.5	18.1	18.1	12.7	4.0	9.8

Among 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2009, 31 percent (246 out of 783) of those who did not have valid operator's licenses also had previous license suspensions or revocations at the time of the crash (Table 3).

Table 3

15- to 20-Year-Old Young Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes, by Previous Driving Record and License Compliance, 2009

Driving Record	License Compliance				Total (5,148)*	
	Valid (4,302)		Invalid (783)			
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	575	13.4	84	10.7	660	12.8
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	368	8.6	246	31.4	614	11.9
Previous DWI Convictions	44	1.0	37	4.7	81	1.6
Previous Speeding Convictions	852	19.8	136	17.4	988	19.2
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	798	18.5	158	20.2	957	18.6

*Includes 63 drivers with unknown license status.

Note: Excluding all drivers with unknown previous records.

During 2009, 205 15- to 20-year-old motorcycle riders were killed, and an additional 5,000 were injured.

Motorcycles

NHTSA has recently redefined their motorcycle terminology. The following terms will be used to define motorcycle occupants; rider is the operator only, a passenger is any passenger excluding the rider, and a motorcyclist is any occupant of a motorcycle (rider or passenger). Prior NHTSA publications may not reflect this terminology.

During 2009, 205 young motorcycle riders (15 to 20 years old) were killed, and an additional 5,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 37-percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcycle riders and 41-percent effective among motorcycle passengers. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,483 motorcyclists of all ages in 2009, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 732 lives could have been saved.

During 2009, 26 percent of the motorcycle riders between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle riders involved in fatal crashes in 2009, 39 percent were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

Alcohol

All States and the District of Columbia have 21-year-old minimum-drinking-age laws. In 2009, 33 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 years old) who were killed in crashes had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .01 grams per deciliter (g/dL) or higher; 28 percent had a BAC of .08 grams per deciliter (g/dL) or higher (see Table 4).

Drivers are considered to be alcohol-impaired when their BAC is .08 g/dL or higher. Thus, any fatality occurring in a crash involving a driver with a BAC of .08 or higher is considered to be an alcohol-impaired-driving fatality. Alcohol involvement or drinking crashes include fatal crashes in which a driver had a BAC of .01 g/dL or higher.

Table 4

Alcohol Involvement Among Young Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes, by Year and Driver Status, 2000 and 2009

Driver Status	Total Number of Drivers	BAC = .01–.07		BAC = .08 +		BAC = .01 +	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2000							
Survived	4,603	215	5	598	13	813	18
Fatally Injured	3,621	221	6	898	25	1,119	31
Total	8,224	436	5	1,496	18	1,932	23
2009							
Survived	2,812	132	5	307	11	439	16
Fatally Injured	2,336	120	5	651	28	771	33
Total	5,148	252	5	958	19	1,210	24

*Total number of drivers include driver with BAC=.00.

Note: The numbers in the table are rounded to nearest integer.

In 2009, 33 percent of the young drivers (15 to 20 years old) who were killed in crashes had a BAC of .01 g/dL or higher.

In 2009, 24 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes were drinking, compared to 4 percent in injury crashes and 2 percent in property-damage-only crashes.

Among young drivers ages 15 to 20, 625 drivers were killed at the age of 20 – highest in this age category; 41 percent of these drivers were drinking – highest in this age category (see Table 5).

Table 5

Young Drivers Fatally Injured, by Age and Percent With BAC=.01 or Higher, 2009

Age (Years)	Number of Drivers	Percentage With BAC = .01 +
15	41	11
16	218	13
17	316	23
18	558	33
19	578	38
20	625	41

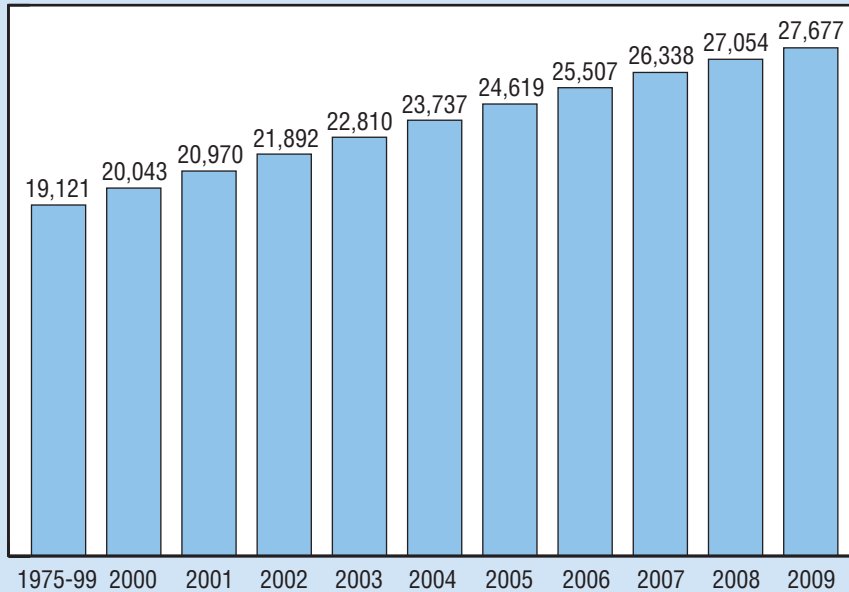
The number of 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had a BAC of .01 g/dL or higher dropped by 37 percent, from 1,932 in 2000 to 1,210 in 2009.

For young drivers (15 to 20 years old), alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 2009, 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 2009, 60 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, 70 percent were unrestrained.

NHTSA estimates that the 21-year-old minimum-drinking-age laws have reduced alcohol traffic fatalities by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 27,677 lives since 1975. In 2009, an estimated 623 lives were saved by minimum-drinking-age laws.

Figure 2
Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved, by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2009



NHTSA estimates that minimum-drinking-age laws have saved 27,677 lives since 1975.

For more information:

Information on traffic fatalities is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA), NVS-424, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE., Washington, DC 20590. NCSA can be contacted at 800-934-8517 or via the following e-mail address: ncsaweb@dot.gov. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at www.nhtsa.gov/NCSA. 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 *Alcohol-Impaired Driving*, *Bicyclists and Other Cyclists*, *Children*, *Large Trucks*, *Motorcycles*, *Occupant Protection*, *Older Population*, *Overview*, *Passenger Vehicles*, *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/CATS/index.aspx.

Table 6
Fatalities in Crashes Involving Young Drivers (Ages 15-20), by State and Person Type, 2009

State	Young Drivers	Passengers in Young Drivers' Vehicles	Occupants of Other Vehicles	Nonoccupants	Total
Alabama	70	34	32	6	142
Alaska	4	4	0	3	11
Arizona	36	23	38	11	108
Arkansas	41	25	21	9	96
California	149	148	123	56	476
Colorado	24	11	26	8	69
Connecticut	18	7	5	3	33
Delaware	8	8	4	5	25
District of Columbia	2	0	0	0	2
Florida	136	86	101	66	389
Georgia	62	33	37	17	149
Hawaii	10	7	2	1	20
Idaho	17	14	11	1	43
Illinois	54	32	31	14	131
Indiana	47	41	38	2	128
Iowa	25	17	20	5	67
Kansas	41	22	17	2	82
Kentucky	57	33	37	6	133
Louisiana	70	43	33	8	154
Maine	11	4	2	3	20
Maryland	36	15	23	14	88
Massachusetts	19	10	15	5	49
Michigan	59	34	46	18	157
Minnesota	25	14	27	6	72
Mississippi	65	38	29	8	140
Missouri	66	37	43	8	154
Montana	24	6	9	2	41
Nebraska	23	18	12	2	55
Nevada	16	15	10	2	43
New Hampshire	7	6	4	2	19
New Jersey	35	12	19	16	82
New Mexico	26	17	19	7	69
New York	72	52	35	32	191
North Carolina	114	43	44	18	219
North Dakota	11	11	3	0	25
Ohio	84	33	49	17	183
Oklahoma	57	42	34	0	133
Oregon	28	15	15	2	60
Pennsylvania	96	58	52	15	221
Rhode Island	6	5	2	1	14
South Carolina	67	27	36	8	138
South Dakota	9	10	2	0	21
Tennessee	65	51	36	6	158
Texas	241	146	142	27	556
Utah	16	20	14	4	54
Vermont	7	2	2	0	11
Virginia	57	36	23	3	119
Washington	35	25	19	10	89
West Virginia	26	20	8	2	56
Wisconsin	45	23	21	6	95
Wyoming	17	14	1	1	33
U.S. Total	2,336	1,447	1,372	468	5,623
Puerto Rico	13	12	11	14	50