

100 deadliest days here for teen drivers

Teens most at risk for fatal crashes during summer

With high schools nearly closed and summer vacations getting underway, the bright sunny days of summer can be a dark time for teen drivers. Memorial Day to Labor Day marks the "100 Deadliest Days for Teen Drivers." More teens are killed on the roads during this time of year than any other.

Automobile crashes are the No. 1 killer of teenagers in the U.S. with nearly 5,000 teens killed every year and more than 300,000 injured. This tragedy is compounded by the fact that many crashes are preventable. Driver error, speeding and distractions are the main causes of teen crashes, and seemingly simple activities such as switching radio stations or interacting with friends can significantly impair a teen's ability to react quickly to changing traffic conditions.

A majority of teens admit to risky driving behaviors.

Fifty-six percent make and answer phone calls while driving.

Fifty-five percent exceed the speed limit by more than 10 mph.

The area of the human brain that controls multitasking, impulse control and the ability to envision consequences - areas crucial for driving - is still developing well into an individual's 20s.

Talking on a cell phone increases the likelihood of an accident by four times and slows the average person's reaction time to that of a 70- year-old.

Parents need to play a large role in developing their teen's safe driving behaviors. Parents usually acknowledge that they must play a significant role in preparing their teens to drive, but many delay safe-driving conversations with their teens until shortly before licensure. Parents also understand they are role models on the road, yet their driving behaviors send the wrong message. For example, 71 percent admit to talking on a cell phone while driving with their teens, and 26 percent say they have broken the law with their teens in the car.

Here are some tips for parents to start a conversation with teens about smart driving:

Make your talks a dialog about driving. Remember, teens are excited about driving itself; it's a fun topic for them. So don't turn your talks into lectures; instead, make them open dialogs that show you understand the positive side of getting behind the wheel, and let your teens share their views and experiences at the same time.

Speak to their desire to be smart. Being a "safe driver" is not something teens aspire to become. Smart driving, on the other hand, combines skill and safety, and is something that teens can attain.

Empower your teen. Being a passenger in another teen's car can put your teen at risk. Peer pressure among teens can be both positive and negative. Make sure your teen knows it's okay to say something if they are uncomfortable while riding with a friend.

Be Parental. Express Your Authority. Your teens want to know your values and expect you to provide structure for them. They need you to be a parent, not another friend. Consider using a Parent Teen Driving Contract to explain driving rules of your home. And, consistently enforce those rules. If your teen violates those rules,

deliver on consequences! Though taking away the driving privilege for a period of time might not be convenient for you, it might end up saving your teen's life.

This story was obtained through Gulf Breeze News information services.