

# Fatal teen driver crashes down

The majority of fatal crashes involving teenage drivers continue to be drivers other than the teens involved, according to 10 years of crash data by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

The data shows that about two-thirds of the fatalities in crashes involving drivers age 15 to 17 are their passengers, occupants of other vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists and other road users.

Nationally between 1998 and 2007, these crashes resulted in 28,138 fatalities — 10,388 were teen drivers themselves. The remaining 17,750 deaths included 8,829 passengers, 6,858 occupants of other vehicles operated by adult drivers and 2,063 nonmotorists and others.

In North Dakota between 1998 and 2007, crashes involving drivers between the ages of 15 and 17 killed 110 people, including 52 teenage drivers. The remaining 58 included 33 passengers, 20 occupants of other vehicles operated by adult drivers and five nonmotorists.

Minnesota figures fall more in line with national statistics: 205 teen drivers were killed, 170 passengers, 147 occupants in other vehicles and 23 non-motorists.

AAA points to the drop in both teen driver deaths and the larger drop in deaths of others during the past decade as evidence that improving teen driver safety benefits all road users.

States with comprehensive graduated driver licensing systems, which help new drivers gain experience under less-risky conditions, have been shown to reduce deaths among 16-year-old drivers by 38 percent, according to AAA.

North Dakota, Arkansas and Kansas are without a three-stage GDL system for teen drivers.

“We had worked with a coalition from across the state and had a bill introduced in the North Dakota legislature, but it was defeated,” AAA spokesman Gene LaDoucer said. “We’ll try again next session to better define to our legislators the need for graduated driver licensing systems. By that time, we could be the only state without it.”

AAA also encourages parents to play a leading role in developing their teen driver through discussion, quality instruction, parent-teen driving agreements, extensive practice driving and choosing a safe vehicle for their teen