

Texas Leads in Curbing Teen Driving Deaths

Each year, some 5,000 teens die on the nation's roadways, victims of inexperience and distraction.

But a report out today says the state of Texas is getting teens to drive more safely, by changing the way they're licensed, as **CBS News correspondent Don Teague** reports.

They are scenes repeated too often in America - memorials and tears for teen drivers killed in traffic accidents.

Among the major culprits are "texting, talking on the cell phone talking to their friends in the next seat turning their head, not paying attention," said driving instructor William Keeling.

Still, for 15-year-old Jessie Goodwin, having her second driving lesson in suburban Dallas, the odds of surviving her teen driving years are better than ever.

While fatal accidents involving teenaged drivers are falling nationwide, in Texas they've dropped at twice the national rate, down 33 percent in just five years, from 625 in 2002 to 419 in 2007.

After completing driver training Goodwin will get what's called a graduated license at 16. For the first six months, the license restricts her from driving with more than one friend in the car or after midnight or using a cell phone.

Texas isn't the only state with required driver's training or graduated licenses for teens. In fact, every state has some version of the program. But here, they go a step further.

A new study credits a public awareness campaign called "Teens in the Drivers Seat" with lowering the fatality rate for teen drivers in Texas.

The campaign reaches 250,000 kids in at least 300 schools and uses positive peer pressure to deliver safe driving messages.

"Kids value their friends' opinion sometimes more than their parents because everyone wants to be cool, I guess," said 17-year-old Tim Trieu.

"Once we make that small group of teens aware they start getting that message out to each other," said Kristy Madsen of the Texas Transportation Institute. "It just starts almost like a weed of information and it starts to change habits."

Other states hope to copy the Texas program - and its success making teens safer behind the wheel.