



New Mexico DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

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Michael R. Sandoval, Cabinet Secretary

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Adults are the key to teen driving success

*NMDOT recommends talking to teens about the importance of driving safety
During National Teen Driver Safety Week*

SANTA FE – National Teen Driver Safety Week is October 17-23. It is the perfect opportunity to talk with teens about safe driving habits. This year, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is teaming up with the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to help empower parents to discuss the importance of driving safety with their young drivers.

According to NHTSA, motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for teens (15-18 years old) in the United States. There were 2,042 people killed in crashes involving a teen driving a passenger vehicle (15-18 years old) in 2019; 628 of the deaths were the teen driver. In 2019, an estimated 92,000 teen drivers were injured in motor vehicle crashes and an estimated 264,000 people were injured in crashes involving a teen driver, accounting for almost 10% of all those injured that year.

“Parents play a critical role in teen driver safety in their ability to consistently communicate important driving safety information,” said Transportation Secretary Mike Sandoval. “New teen drivers are still gaining experience behind the wheel, which increases the chance of dangerous situations for the teen and others around them.”

By sharing their driving experience and discussing the most dangerous and deadly driving behaviors, parents can help teen drivers make smart choices and actions to stay safe on the road.

Topics to talk about include:

1. **Impaired Driving:** Driving under the influence can have deadly consequences. All teens are too young to legally buy, possess, or consume alcohol. However, nationally, 16% of teen passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2019 had alcohol in their system. Alcohol isn’t the only substance that can keep teens from driving safely: marijuana affects a driver’s ability to react to their surroundings. Driving is a complex task and marijuana slows the reaction time.

2. **Seat Belt Safety:** Wearing a seat belt is one of the simplest ways for teens to stay safe in a vehicle. Yet, too many teens aren't buckling up. More than half (55%) of the teen passenger vehicle drivers who died in crashes in 2019 were unbuckled. Teen drivers and passengers are more likely to die in a crash if they are unbuckled (nine out of 10 of the passengers who died were also unbuckled).
3. **Distracted Driving:** Cell phone use while driving is more than just risky — it can be deadly. Texting while driving is outlawed in 47 states. Any phone use while driving (texting, talking, or using any social media apps) is unacceptable and illegal. Even if teens are stopped at a light.

Distracted driving isn't limited to cell phone use. Other passengers, audio, and climate controls in the vehicle, eating, or drinking while driving are all examples of dangerous distractions for teen drivers. In 2019, among teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes, 10% were reported as distracted at the time of the crash. Headphones are not appropriate to wear while driving a vehicle. All drivers need to be able to hear another vehicle's horn or the siren from an emergency vehicle, so they can safely move over and out of the path.

4. **Speed Limits:** Speeding is a critical issue for all drivers, especially for teens who are less experienced. In 2019, more than one-quarter (27%) of all teen drivers of passenger vehicles involved in fatal crashes were speeding at the time of the crash. Males were more likely to be involved in fatal speeding-related crashes than females.
5. **Passengers:** Passengers in a teen's vehicle can lead to disastrous consequences. Research shows the risk of a fatal crash dramatically increases in direct relation to the number of passengers in a vehicle. The likelihood of teen drivers engaging in risky behavior triples when traveling with multiple passengers.

Self-reported surveys show teens whose parents set firm rules for driving typically engaged in less risky driving behaviors and were involved in fewer crashes.

NHTSA [offers parents and caregivers helpful tips](#) and a framework for having discussions with their teen drivers about risky driving behaviors that can lead to fatal consequences.

NHTSA's website, www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/teen-driving, has detailed information and statistics on teen driving, and outlines the basic rules parents can use to help reduce the risks for teen drivers.

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NMDOT

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