

# Limit Teens' Saturday-Night Driving, Experts Suggest

By Lisa Rapaport | February 14, 2017



(Reuters Health) - Drunk driving contributes to more than one in four motor vehicle fatalities for children, teens and young adults - and nearly half of these deaths happen at night or on weekends, a U.S. study suggests.

"The vast majority of young people who die in alcohol-related crashes are killed on Friday and Saturday evenings," said lead study author Dr. Scott Hadland of Boston University School of Medicine.

"Parents might consider limiting the extent to which young people drive during late hours on weekends," Hadland added by email.

Even if youth themselves are not drinking and driving, they are more likely to be killed by adults who have been drinking and driving on weekend evenings, Hadland said.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for children and teens. Laws like zero tolerance for any level of alcohol in the bloodstream or restricted hours for driving or buying liquor have helped curb fatalities, previous research has found.

The current study, which examined the combined impact of multiple policies to reduce drunk driving, found fatalities were much less likely in states with the toughest mix of laws.

Researchers analyzed crashes that occurred from 2000 to 2013 and involved at least one driver with a blood alcohol level of at least 0.08 percent, the legal limit in most states. For a typical adult, drinking more than one beer or glass of wine in an hour will produce a blood alcohol level above this limit.

During the study period, there were 84,756 motor vehicle crash fatalities among people 20 and younger, including 23,757 collisions involving alcohol, researchers report in *Pediatrics* online February 13.

People killed in these crashes were predominantly male (73 percent) and most were at least 18 years old.

Researchers also scored each state on a scale up to 100 points for having the most restrictive legal environment for drunk driving.

Policies received higher points if they were deemed more effective at curbing drunk driving and related fatalities. These included laws restricting hours for alcohol sales or limiting when teens can drive or who can be in the car with them.

Average scores ranged from a low of 24 in Iowa at the start of the study to a high of 75 in Utah near the end of the study period.

Each 10-point increase in this score was associated with 9 percent lower odds of fatalities, the study found.

One limitation of the study is that researchers lacked data to assess how well laws were enforced.

Still, the findings suggest that states can help prevent alcohol-related deaths by strengthening policies to deter drunk driving, said Dr. Beth Ebel of the University of Washington and Seattle Children's Hospital, who wasn't involved in the study.

Parents, who usually own the car and pay the insurance for teen drivers, have a crucial role to play, too, Ebel added by email.

Review a driving contract with your teen, she suggests: "No seat belt, no car; any drinking, no car."

"Parents can also set a consistent example with their own behavior," Ebel said. "Never drive impaired, buckle up, drive courteously, put down your cell phone and use carpool time to catch up with your kid."

While it's best to keep young drivers off the road late at night, parents can also teach teens how to spot and avoid erratic drivers who might be drunk, said Russell Griffin, a researcher at the University of Alabama at Birmingham who wasn't involved

in the study.

"Parents can educate the kids on signs of a driver under the influence such as speed fluctuations, hard braking, and increased lane deviations like swerving between lanes," Griffin said by email. "By identifying these signs, the young driver can put distance between themselves and the driver under the influence."

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