

Oregon graduated drivers license program falls short

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According to results of a study released recently by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (AAAFTS), Oregon's Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) program has room for improvement. AAAFTS included seven basic GDL components in its research, and found that 16-year-old drivers are involved in 38 percent fewer fatal crashes and 40 percent fewer crashes resulting in injuries if their state GDL program has at least five of the seven common components. Those seven components are:

- A minimum age of at least 16 years for receiving a learner's permit.
- A requirement to hold the learner's permit for at least 6 months before receiving a license that allows any unsupervised driving.
- A requirement for certification of at least 30 hours of supervised driving practice during the learner stage.
- An intermediate stage of licensing with a minimum entry age of at least 16 years and 6 months.
- A nighttime driving restriction for intermediate license holders, beginning no later than 10 p.m.
- A passenger restriction for intermediate license holders, allowing no more than one passenger (except family members).
- A minimum age of 17 years for full, unrestricted licensure.

During the study period, no state had more than five GDL components in effect. As of February 15, 2007, Delaware has all seven components, and Kentucky and the District of Columbia have six.

The Oregon GDL system matches four of the seven components, but Oregon teens qualify for a learner's permit at age 15; they can get a provisional license at age 16; and they cannot drive between midnight and five a.m.

The research found that in states with GDL programs that have four of the seven components, 16-year-old drivers were involved in 21 percent fewer fatal crashes and 36 percent fewer injury crashes.

In states with three-stage GDL programs, the study found 16-year-old drivers were involved in 11 percent fewer fatal crashes, and 19 percent fewer injury crashes. A typical three-stage GDL program comprises a learner stage, during which all driving must be supervised; followed by an intermediate stage, during which unsupervised driving is permitted except under certain conditions (such as at night or with passengers); and finally full, unrestricted licensure. Currently, 43 states, including Oregon, and the District of Columbia have three-stage GDL systems; all states have some form of GDL.

The AAAFTS funded researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to analyze the impact of GDL programs implemented in the United States between 1994 and 2004 and the involvement of 16-year-old drivers in fatal and injury crashes, and to identify characteristics common to effective programs. The report "Nationwide Review of Graduated Driver Licensing," is available online at www.aaafoundation.org.

"This research provides more evidence that effective graduated driver licensing systems are important in helping teens to be safer on our roads," said AAA Oregon Public Affairs Director Elliott Eki. "Parents can help, too, by imposing limits that the state laws might be missing."

Motor vehicle crashes remain the number one cause of death for teens in the United States, and roughly 1,000 16-year-old drivers are involved in fatal crashes each year.