



Teen Driver Safety

Timing of Driver's License Acquisition and Reasons for Delay among Young People in the United States, 2012

The Situation

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teenagers
- Despite the traditional view that teens are eager to begin driving as soon as possible, evidence of young adults voluntarily **delaying** licensure has raised a number of questions in recent years
- Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) systems – which have reduced 16- and 17-year-old driver crashes – generally do not apply to drivers ages 18 and older
- Concern persists that if teens are delaying licensure, many may not be covered by GDL protections

New Study

- Objectives:
 - Determine proportion of teens licensed within 12 months of home state minimum age, and by 18th birthday
 - Investigate reasons for delay (e.g., financial constraints, GDL concerns) and demographic factors (e.g., household income)
- Methods:
 - Nationally-representative survey of 1,039 persons ages 18-20
 - Online questionnaire (English and Spanish)
- Questionnaire addressed:
 - Current license status
 - Ages when permit and license were obtained
 - Reasons for delay (19 items; each could be rated a *very important reason, somewhat important reason, minor reason, or not a reason*)
 - Opinions about driver licensing policies

Key Findings – Licensure Status and Timing of Licensure

- 44% licensed within 12 months of minimum age in their state
- 54% licensed before 18th birthday
- 29% still not licensed at time of survey (12% had learner's permit)

Teens have the highest crash rate of any group in the United States.



Key Findings – Factors Associated with Licensure by 18th Birthday

- Household Income
 - <\$20K/year: **25%** licensed by age 18
 - >\$100K/year: **79%** licensed by 18
- Race/Ethnicity
 - Non-Hispanic white: **67%** licensed by 18
 - Non-Hispanic black: **37%** licensed by 18
 - Hispanic: **29%** licensed by 18

Key Findings – Self-Reported Reasons for Delay

- Biggest reasons for delay were not having a car (44%), ability to get around without driving (39%), cost of gas (36%), cost overall (36%), and “just didn’t get around to it” (35%)
- Fewer than one in four cited reasons related to GDL and driving restrictions

Key Findings – Opinions about Driver Licensing Policies

- 77% support restrictions on novice drivers carrying teen passengers (in general)
 - 12% say zero should be allowed; 32% say one
- 77% support night-time driving restrictions (in general)
 - 51% say these should start at 10PM or earlier
- 28% support requiring all new drivers, regardless of age, to first obtain a restricted license
- Nearly all (96%) believe age 16 is the youngest a teen should be able to get a license that allows independent driving; more than half (58%) believe it should be 17

Conclusions

- Most teens don’t get licensed right away
- At least 36% of drivers will get licensed outside GDL provisions
- Most who delay licensure say this is due to cost, financial constraints, or lack of opportunity or interest
- Despite speculation that teens may be delaying licensure to avoid the restrictions imposed by GDL, relatively few cite this as a reason for their decision
- Even if GDL isn’t the main *reason* for licensure delay, significant numbers of novice drivers are likely not exposed to GDL protections *because* of the delay

Useful Resources

AAA and the AAA Foundation are committed to helping teens stay safe on the roads, and have developed several resources for families with teen drivers:

- TeenDriving.AAA.com – This AAA site provides state-specific information to help parents and their teens navigate the learning-to-drive process.
- [Driver-Zed](#) – This interactive risk-management training tool is designed to help teens recognize how to react in a variety of driving scenarios.
- [Dare To Prepare](#) – Dare to Prepare is a 90-minute pre-permit presentation for parents and teens that provides critical information families need to know before teens take the wheel. A shorter online version of the program is available at www.TeenDriving.AAA.com.

For more information about the AAA Foundation’s teen safety research, please visit www.AAAFoundation.org.

