

Summer Safety Protections for teen drivers



Background

At Connecticut Children's, advocacy is an important part of advancing children's health and well-being. When families start getting ready for summer, our pediatric experts start thinking about the particular risks that kids face this time of year. This issue brief is part of a Summer Safety series that offers key insights for parents and policymakers about how to protect our kids and how to strengthen the laws that help keep them safe. Advocating for public policy solutions that promote summer safety is a team sport at Connecticut Children's involving collaborative work among our Emergency Medicine, Infectious Disease & Injury Prevention experts and our Government Relations team.

Helping to shape laws that keep teen drivers safe

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [car crashes are the leading cause of teen deaths in the US](#). With this in mind, Connecticut Children's has been on the front lines of advocacy to protect teen drivers for nearly three decades. Connecticut's Graduated Driver Licensing law was implemented in stages. Starting in 1997 with implementation of a 6-month learner's permit, legislators enacted a series of restrictions in the decade that followed including passenger limits for new teen drivers and nighttime curfews. At legislative public hearings, Connecticut Children's pediatric experts frequently shared their support for the restrictions and offered the results of their research that showed how a teen's risk of causing a serious crash predictably increases when passengers are in the car and while driving at night.

In 2007, Governor Jodi Rell created a task force to review Connecticut's teen driver laws in response to a series of motor vehicle crashes. Recommendations from that task force, which included Connecticut Children's pediatric surgeon Dr. Brendan Campbell, led legislators to enact significant changes the following year that brought Connecticut's teen driving laws from among the most lenient in the nation to one of the strictest.



Research to demonstrate impact

In a 2011 article in the *Journal of Trauma, Injury, Infection and Critical Care* (Volume 71, Number 2, November Supplement 2 2011), Connecticut Children's researchers outlined the impact of our state's teen driving laws by comparing motor vehicle crash (MVC) rates for 1999 and 2008. They found that:

- MVC rates **decreased by 40%** for 16-year-old and **decreased by 30%** for 17-year-old drivers, and
- During the nighttime restricted driving times, MVC rates **decreased by 54%** for 16-year-old and **decreased by 49%** for 17-year-old drivers.

Monitoring the results and promoting parent awareness

Connecticut Children's advocacy to protect teen drivers includes keeping an eye on the impact of new laws. In 2020, advocates noticed an alarming trend: during the prior year, Connecticut saw the highest number of fatal crashes by teen drivers since the strict laws went into effect. In 2013, Connecticut Children's researchers

presented the results of a study at a meeting of the Eastern Association for the Surgery of Trauma, in which they found that half of teenage driving fatalities occurred in crashes where laws for novice drivers were being violated. Taken together, this data suggests that as a community, we were not doing enough to enforce the teen driver laws.

Members of the teen driving task force [wrote an opinion article in CTMirror](#) urging parents to enforce teen driving laws with their children. The authors noted that the need for Graduated Driver Licensing is rooted in science. Explaining that “the human brain is not fully developed in teens and does not fully develop until about 25 years old,” they showed that it is hard for teens to assess risk. The article offered tips for parents to take a “strong and pro-active approach to helping teens understand the consequences of their choices when operating or riding in a vehicle”. Continuing to promote awareness of the positive impact of teen driving restrictions is a key part of Connecticut Children’s advocacy work.

Recent legislative proposals to dial back the restrictions

Despite the data showing the positive impact of Connecticut’s law, legislators have recently proposed bills that would remove some restrictions on teen drivers. In February 2026, the Executive Director of Connecticut Children’s Injury Prevention Center, Kevin Borrup, [submitted testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 234](#), a proposal to allow newly licensed 16- and 17-year-old drivers to transport their siblings before completing the first six months of driving restrictions required by current law. While the proposal was intended to address family convenience, he noted that research consistently shows that teen drivers are safest when they do not have peer or sibling passengers during their earliest months of driving. Those first months are critical for building experience, confidence, and safe driving habits. [Parents can also support their new teen drivers by providing guidance about how they can successfully avoid driving distractions.](#)

What do Connecticut’s current teen driving laws require?

- First 6 months: passengers can only include parents or legal guardians at least one of whom holds a valid driver license, a licensed driving instructor or an instructor who has held a license for at least 4 years with no suspensions.
- Second 6 months: passengers may include immediate family members.
- Until age 18:
 - No driving between 11 pm – 5 am unless it is for employment, school, religious activities or medical necessity.
 - Drivers may not use cell phones (even hands-free) or other mobile electronic devices while driving.
- Penalties for failure to comply can include immediate loss of license or suspension.



Source:
https://portal.ct.gov/highwaysafetyoffice/traffic-safety-programs/teen-driving?language=en_US

Recommended Legislative Changes for 2027

1. A significant gap in parent knowledge exists as to the reason for the GDL and the parent role in GDL enforcement at home. The implementation of a robust education campaign targeting parents of teen drivers should be made a priority by the State.
2. Connecticut’s nighttime driving restriction begins at 11pm. However, the deadliest period for teens is from 9:00 pm to 6:00 am. The state legislature should consider resetting the nighttime driving restriction start to an earlier time. A 10:00 pm start would reduce the risk for teens.
3. The more time a teen has behind the wheel, the lower their risk. Connecticut should consider a modest increase from 40 to 50 hours of required driving practice time, including 10 practice hours at night, prior to licensure.