

Many new teen drivers 'crash' in simulated driving task

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Study suggests despite getting licenses, adolescents lacked key skills to stay safe.

(HealthDay)—Around four in 10 newly licensed teen drivers "crashed" in a simulated driving test, suggesting that many adolescents lack the skills they need to stay safe on the road, according to a new study.

The simulated driving assessment (SDA) included a 35-minute "drive" replicating 22 variations of the most common scenarios that often cause [teens](#) to crash.

"During the SDA, 42.9 percent of teens within three months of licensure, and 29.4 percent of experienced adult drivers had at least one simulated collision," said Catherine McDonald, the study's lead author, and a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing in Philadelphia.

"For every additional error in the SDA, the risk for crashing or running off the road in the simulator increased 8 percent," she added.

Findings from the study were published online in the journal *Injury Prevention*.

Motor vehicle crashes remain the number one cause of death among teens, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Nearly seven teens between 16 and 19 die every

day in the United States from [motor vehicle](#) accidents, the CDC says.

Researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's Center for Injury Research and Prevention and the University of Pennsylvania developed the SDA to evaluate recently licensed [teen drivers'](#) ability to perform in high-risk scenarios.

The SDA provides information about skill deficits in these hazardous situations. In turn, this can determine which skills teens need to practice with a parent or driving instructor before they drive alone.

For the study, researchers recruited 21 teenagers who were 16 or 17 years old. Each teen had their license for less than 90 days, and the median for the group was 35 days, the study authors noted. The other study group included 17 adults, aged 25 to 50. The adult group had their licenses for five years or more. The median for the group was 15 years. The adults drove at least 100 miles a week, and had no moving violations within the last three years.

"Our study results show that these newly licensed teens showed mastery of basic skills, such as using turn signals," McDonald said. "But more advanced driving behaviors, such as braking in hazardous situations and anticipating and responding to hazards, proved challenging," she added.

"It is worrisome that the participants in our study were all licensed drivers yet many had inadequate driving skills, even without common distractions like texting and peer passengers," she explained.

In an attempt to make new drivers safer, most states have implemented [graduated driver licensing](#). Graduated driver licensing includes laws that place restrictions on newly licensed drivers regarding things such as how many passengers they can have in the vehicle and limitations for

driving at night, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA). The restrictions are gradually lifted.

Jonathan Adkins, executive director of the GHSA, pointed out that while graduated driver licensing is a good thing, more needs to be done to keep teens safe.

"Graduated driver licensing laws that limit distractions and driving time are key, but teens also need to learn the hands-on skills that will keep them safe throughout their driving life. This new research shows that it's possible to identify the gaps in those skills without endangering teens in the process by using the simulated driving assessment," said Adkins.

"The data from the SDA will be useful to help develop teen driver training that specifically targets the identified skill deficits," he suggested.

McDonald said parents can also play an important role in helping their young drivers develop more advanced skills. This requires parents to think about the skills they have developed over time.

"Adults tend to go into 'autopilot' mode and they forget what is behind the skills that prevent crashing," McDonald said. "For instance, saying 'slow down' to teens is insufficient. Parents need to point out when and how to ease up on the gas pedal and how to apply the brake pedal for situations where they need to slow down or stop.

"Parents need to coach their teens to manage their speed, scan for hazards, set a safe following distance at different speeds, and scan while making left hand turns. It's also important to coach on how to shut out distractions and focus on driving tasks," she said.

Independent [driving](#) is an important step for many teens, McDonald said. Having access to a car helps them get to school, participate in extracurricular activities, have a job and further their independence.

But safety also needs to be a consideration. "We want to help teens and their families achieve and maintain independent mobility in the safest way

possible," she said.

More information: For downloadable guides, including the Teen Driving Plan, visit Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's [Teen Driver Source](#).

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