

Teen drivers take more chances as senior year begins

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(HealthDay)—Older teens are more likely to do risky things while

driving and have a higher rate of crashes and near misses than their younger classmates, a new survey finds.

Researchers surveyed 2,800 [high school students](#) across the United States. While 3 out of 4 seniors considered themselves safe drivers, they were more likely than younger teens to engage in dangerous or distracted driving—especially using cellphones while behind the wheel, the survey found.

"Older teens are still inexperienced drivers—even if they feel otherwise—as they only have one to two years of real-world practice under their belts," said Mike Sample, lead driving safety expert and technical consultant at Liberty Mutual Insurance, a study sponsor.

"That's why it is important to continue to emphasize the effects and potential consequences of phone use while driving to this age group," he added in a news release from Liberty Mutual and study co-sponsor Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD).

Seniors were more likely to use a phone while driving than sophomores, 71 percent vs. 55 percent, the survey showed. This occurs most often at a red light or stop sign and in stop- and-go traffic.

In addition, 67 percent of seniors admitted using apps while driving, compared with 58 percent of juniors and 49 percent of sophomores.

Other dangerous behaviors also became more common as [teen](#) drivers got older, including:

- **Changing music via phone or app:** Seniors, 40 percent; juniors, 32 percent; sophomores, 26 percent.
- **Speeding:** Seniors, 35 percent; juniors, 23 percent; sophomores, 18 percent.

- **Driving when drowsy:** Seniors, 26 percent; juniors, 15 percent; sophomores, 13 percent.

Seniors were also more likely to have three or more passengers in the car.

The study also found that they had more crashes and near misses (57 percent) than sophomores (34 percent).

The survey sponsors said parents may unwittingly play a part in older teens' behind-the-wheel risk-taking.

Nearly 70 percent of 15- and 16-year-olds said they would lose driving privileges if they had a crash, compared with 55 percent of those 18 and older.

Dr. Gene Berlin, [senior](#) advisor on adolescent psychiatry with SADD, said it's natural for teens to gain confidence as they get older and drive more. But overconfidence can cause trouble.

"This age group is more likely to test the boundaries as consequences for bad driving behaviors decrease and their freedoms and responsibilities at home increase, making them feel more like adults," he said. "As a result, it is even more important for parents and teens to have conversations about safe driving practices to avoid potentially putting themselves and others at risk on the road."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [teen drivers](#).

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