

Traffic Safety Facts 1994

U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration



Young Drivers



There were 175.1 million licensed drivers in the United States in 1994. Young drivers, between 15 and 20 years old, accounted for 6.7 percent (11.7 million) of the total, a 14 percent decrease from the 13.7 million young drivers in 1984.

In 1994, 7,957 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes—a 23 percent decrease from the 10,046 involved in 1984. Driver fatalities for this age group decreased by 24 percent between 1984 and 1994.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 20 year olds (based on 1991 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 1994, an estimated 3,446 drivers 15 to 20 years old were killed, and an additional 330,000 were injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

In 1994, 14 percent (7,957) of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes (57,512) were young drivers 15 to 20 years old, and 16 percent (1,859,000) of all the drivers involved in police-reported crashes (11,421,000) were young drivers.

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for people from 15 to 20 years old.”

Figure 1. Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old, 1984-1994

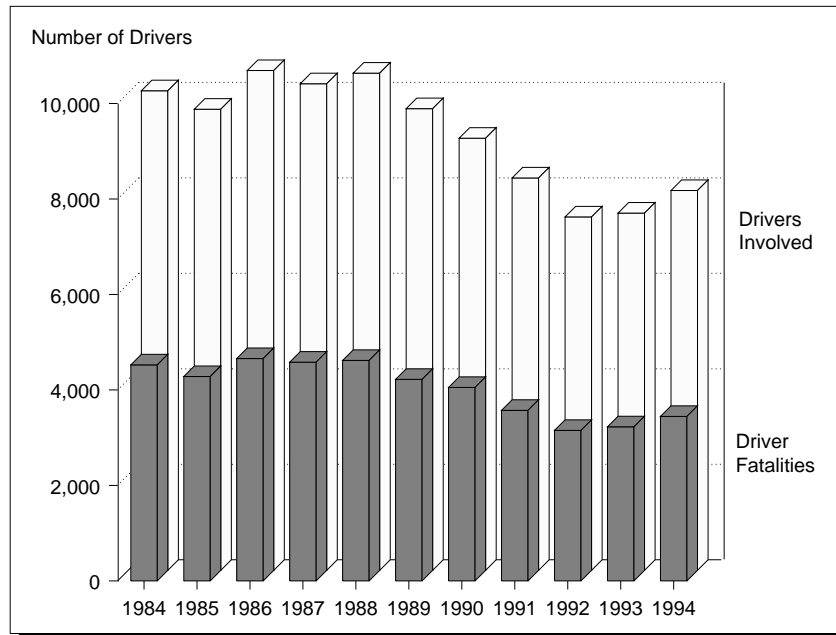


Table 1. Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age Group, 1994

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
Licensed Drivers (Percent)	6.7	7.9	22.7	22.1	15.7	10.9	5.0	9.0
Population (Percent)	8.1	5.7	15.9	16.0	11.5	8.1	3.8	8.9
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
Single-Vehicle	18.4	13.6	24.1	16.9	9.8	5.5	2.3	5.7
Multi-Vehicle	12.3	10.3	23.3	19.0	13.1	7.9	3.4	9.6
All Fatal Crashes	14.6	11.5	23.6	18.2	11.9	7.0	3.0	8.1
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers	67.8	45.3	32.5	25.6	23.5	20.0	18.7	28.2

Nearly one-third of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes who had an invalid operator's license at the time of the crash also had a previous license suspension or revocation. For the same age group, approximately one-third of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes during 1994 had been drinking. Restraint use decreases significantly among drinking drivers.

“In 1994, 14 percent of all the drivers involved in fatal crashes were between 15 and 20 years old.”

Table 2. Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 1994

Driving Record	License Status					
	Valid (6,769)		Invalid (1,087)		Total (7,856)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,454	21.5	178	16.4	1,632	20.8
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	431	6.4	352	32.4	783	10.0
Previous DWI Convictions	61	0.9	51	4.7	112	1.4
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,672	24.7	188	17.3	1,860	23.7
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Convictions	1,232	18.2	239	22.0	1,471	18.7

For 77 percent of the drivers 15 to 20 years old who were involved in fatal crashes in 1994, police reported one or more errors or other factors related to the driver's behavior. The factor most often noted was “failure to keep proper lane or running off the road,” followed by “driving too fast.”

In 1994, the estimated economic cost of police-reported crashes involving drivers between 15 and 20 years old was \$31.2 billion.

Motorcycles

An estimated 297 young motorcycle drivers (15-20 years old) were killed and an additional 8,000 were injured during 1994.

Helmets are estimated to be 29 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 518 motorcyclists in 1994, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 300 lives could have been saved.

During 1994, 47 percent of the motorcycle drivers between 15 and 20 years old who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 1994, about one-quarter (24 percent) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license, and 20 percent had been drinking.

Alcohol

NHTSA defines a fatal traffic crash as being alcohol-related if either a driver or a nonoccupant (e.g., pedestrian) had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.01 grams per deciliter (g/dl) or greater in a police-reported traffic crash. Persons with a BAC of 0.10 g/dl or greater involved in fatal crashes are considered to be intoxicated. This is the legal limit of intoxication in most states.

In 1994, 22 percent of the young drivers 15 to 20 years old who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.

Table 3. Alcohol Involvement Among Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes, 1994

Driver Status	Number of Drivers	Percentage With BAC Levels		
		0.00 g/dl	0.01-0.09 g/dl	≥ 0.10 g/dl
Surviving	4,511	84.5	7.6	7.9
Fatally Injured	3,446	68.9	9.5	21.7
Total	7,957	77.7	8.4	13.9

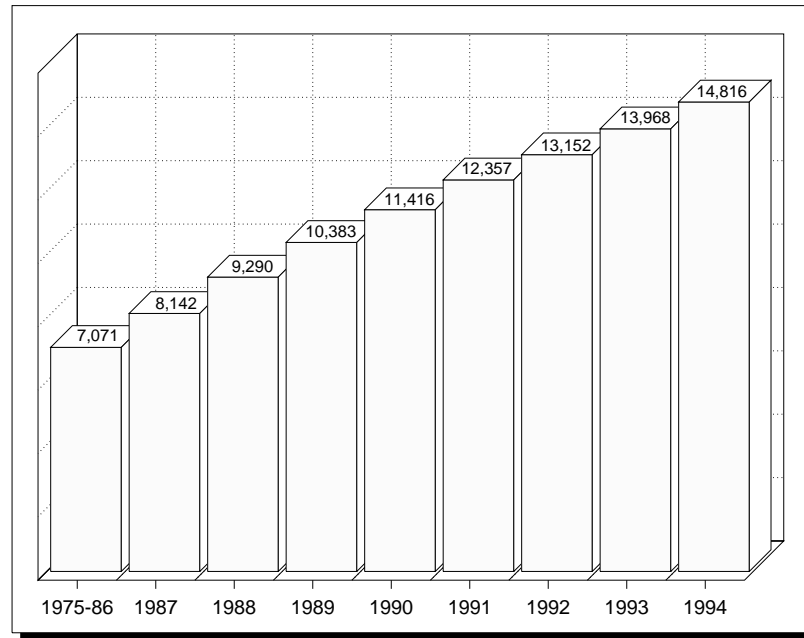
The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 1994, 2 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 4 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 22 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

The proportions of *intoxicated* young drivers (with a BAC of 0.10 g/dl or greater) killed in motor vehicle crashes, and of young drivers involved in fatal crashes, have decreased significantly since 1984. In both categories (drivers killed and drivers involved in fatal crashes), the number of drivers 15 to 20 years old who were intoxicated dropped by almost 60 percent between 1984 and 1994—the largest decline of any age group.

“In 1994, 22 percent of the young drivers who were killed in crashes were intoxicated.”

All states and the District of Columbia now have 21-year-old minimum drinking age laws. NHTSA estimates that these laws have reduced traffic fatalities involving drivers 18 to 20 years old by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 14,816 lives since 1975. Eleven states have set 0.08 g/dl as the legal intoxication limit, and 20 states plus the District of Columbia have zero tolerance laws for drivers under the age of 21 (that is, drivers under 21 with BAC levels above 0.02 g/dl are considered to be legally intoxicated by the state).

Figure 2. Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-1994



“NHTSA estimates that minimum drinking age laws have saved 14,816 lives since 1975.”

For young drivers 15 to 20 years old, alcohol involvement is higher among males than among females. In 1994, 26 percent of the young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 12 percent of the young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 1994, 74 percent of the young drivers involved in fatal crashes who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 80 percent were unrestrained.

For more information:

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NRD-31, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. Telephone inquiries should be addressed to Ms. Louann Hall at (202) 366-4198. FAX messages should be sent to (202) 366-7078. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Auto Safety Hotline at 1-800-424-9393.

“Serving the Highway Safety Community by the Numbers”

Table 4. Involvement of Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old in Traffic Fatalities, 1984 and 1994

	1984			1994			Percentage Change, 1984-1994		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Number		Percentage Age 15-20
							Total	Age 15-20	
<i>Licensed Drivers (thousands)</i>									
Total	155,424	13,688	8.8	175,128	11,736	6.7	+13%	-14%	-24%
Male	80,977	7,321	9.0	89,000	6,161	6.9	+10%	-16%	-23%
Female	74,447	6,367	8.6	86,128	5,574	6.5	+16%	-12%	-24%
<i>Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes</i>									
Total	57,512	10,046	17.5	54,513	7,957	14.6	-5%	-21%	-17%
Male	44,723	7,906	17.7	40,195	5,803	14.4	-10%	-27%	-19%
Female	11,907	2,139	18.0	13,550	2,152	15.9	+14%	-8%	-12%
<i>Driver Fatalities</i>									
Total	25,589	4,525	17.7	23,694	3,446	14.5	-7%	-24%	-18%
Male	20,088	3,615	18.0	17,551	2,556	14.6	-13%	-29%	-19%
Female	5,500	910	16.5	6,139	890	14.5	+12%	-2%	-12%

Sources: Licensed drivers—Federal Highway Administration.