

Teen-led study highlights dangers of texting and driving

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Some people have questioned whether a ban on texting while driving will actually lead to more crashes because drivers will conceal their cell phones, making it more dangerous to read and type messages. Research led by high school students, however, shows that texting while driving is unsafe regardless of where the phone is positioned.

The study, part of a project called Generation tXt, presented by one of the high school authors on Sunday, April 29, at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Boston.

Generation tXt was designed by Oklahoma youths to help new [teen drivers](#) and families practice safe driving by addressing the hazards of [texting](#) while behind the wheel. The project consists of research, advocacy and education.

Generation tXt student leaders developed and conducted the research, and faculty from the University of Oklahoma School of Community Medicine served as advisers.

In addition to exploring how phone position affects [driving safety](#), the study aimed to address whether [young drivers](#) who are proficient texters can drive and text safely.

Thirty students ages 15-19 participated in the study. Nearly 60 percent had been driving less than a year. Using simulators, the teens drove under three conditions: 1) without a cell phone, 2) texting with the phone

hidden so they had to look down to see texts and 3) texting with the phone in a position of their choice. The simulators recorded unintentional lane shifts, speeding, [crashes](#)/near crashes and other driving infractions.

The result showed the teens consistently drove worse when texting, regardless of whether the phone was hidden. The young drivers drifted out of lanes more often while texting (mean of 13 times with the phone in a position of their choice, 17 times with the phone hidden and less than three times when not using cell phone). They also had more near crashes with other cars and [pedestrians](#) without being aware of these mistakes while texting (four for both cell phone positions vs. two without a cell phone).

The total number of driving infractions while texting was higher, too (18 with the phone in a position of their choice, 22 with phone hidden and five with no [cell phone](#)).

"These data demonstrate that there is no 'safe' or 'better' position that makes texting less dangerous," said Glade Inhofe, the high school student who is the lead author.

Mark D. Fox, MD, PhD, MPH, FAAP, who advised the teens and is associate dean for Community Health and Research Development at the University of Oklahoma School of Community Medicine concurred. "Any texting while driving has an adverse impact on driving performance among teenage drivers under simulated conditions," he said.

Dr. Fox indicated that the student leaders hope to use their research findings to change public policy and educate teens about the dangers of texting while driving.

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