

# Study shows New Jersey's decal for young drivers reduced crashes

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A new study shows that New Jersey's law requiring novice drivers to display a red decal on their license plates has prevented more than 1,600 crashes and helped police officers enforce regulations unique to new drivers. The first-in-the-nation decal provision went into effect in May 2010 as part of N.J.'s Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) law. Nearly every state has a GDL law on the books, but "Kyleigh's Law," named for a teen driver killed in a 2006 N.J. crash, is the first one that requires drivers under age 21 to display their probationary status so that they are more visible to police.

Allison E. Curry, PhD, director of [Epidemiology](#) and [Biostatistics](#) at the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and her colleagues compared GDL-related teen driver citations and [crashes](#) in the two years before the decal law was implemented to citations and crashes in the year following the law's implementation. (In New Jersey—as well as in many other states—new drivers are subject to GDL-specific restrictions meant to keep them as safe and distraction-free as possible while they become more seasoned drivers.) These latest results, published today in the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#), showed that in its first year of implementation, the New Jersey decal provision prevented an estimated 1,600 probationary drivers from crashing. Furthermore, Curry and her colleagues found that the rate at which police issued citations to novice drivers increased 14 percent in the year after decals became required.

"Other countries have been using decals for decades, but this is the first

study to rigorously evaluate their effect on crashes," says Dr. Curry. "The study shows that by taking an additional step to supplement its GDL laws, New Jersey is helping to keep its young drivers safe." At any given time, there are about 65,000 17-year-old probationary drivers on New Jersey's roads.

GDL laws are used by all U.S. states to phase [young drivers](#) into full licensure by extending the learning period and restricting them from engaging in certain behaviors that can increase their crash and resulting fatality risk. Probationary drivers can be fined \$100 for not complying with one (or more) of New Jersey's GDL restrictions, which include limits on the number of passengers that can be in the car, a ban on the use of cell phones and other electronics, and a driving curfew between the hours of 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. Curry and her colleagues noted an impact of the decal law on crashes involving passengers—the rate of crashes involving peer passengers decreased by 9 percent.

"The fact that we saw significant crash reductions in New Jersey, a state that already has a strong GDL law and one of the lowest teen crash fatality rates, suggests that implementation of a decal law in states with higher teen crash fatality rates may lead to even more marked reductions," said Curry. "We hope that our study can help other states looking to reduce teen crash rates."

The researchers linked New Jersey's crash reports and licensing databases to identify novice drivers who have been involved in crashes. The reductions in crashes as a result of the decals were based on the difference between actual crashes and the estimated number of crashes that would have occurred had the decal law not been implemented.

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