

Loud talking and horseplay in car results in more serious incidents for teen drivers

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Adolescent drivers are often distracted by technology while they are driving, but loud conversations and horseplay between passengers appear more likely to result in a dangerous incident, according to a new study from the UNC Highway Safety Research Center.

The work, which appears online today in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, not only reinforces the importance of North Carolina's licensing system for newly minted drivers but also provides an interesting perspective on the role that technology plays in distracted driving.

"Forty three states currently restrict newly licensed drivers from having more than one young passenger in their vehicle," said Robert Foss, senior research scientist at the UNC Highway Safety Research Center, and director of the Center for the Study of Young Drivers. "The results of this study illustrate the importance of such restrictions, which increase the safety of drivers, their passengers and others on the road by reducing the potential chaos that novice drivers experience."

In their work, Foss and his colleague Arthur Goodwin recruited 52 North Carolina high-school age drivers to have in-vehicle cameras mounted in their cars and trucks to observe distracted driving behaviors and distracted conditions when [teen drivers](#) were behind the wheel. Young drivers were recorded in a variety of real-world driving situations over six months - with parents in the car, with other teens in the car and alone.

The study shows that [young drivers](#) were less likely to use cell phones

and other technology (including in-vehicle systems, like the radio and temperature control) when there were passengers in the car with them. But having multiple passengers in the car more often led to more serious incidents. Teen drivers were six times more likely to have a serious incident when there was loud conversation in the vehicle - to the point of needing to make an evasive maneuver to avoid a crash - and three times more likely to have a serious incident when there was horseplay in the vehicle.

Another important finding is that actions the driver alone controls - reaching, texting, using a phone and eating - seem less likely to lead to a serious incident than things they can't control, like how others in the car behave.

"This is why the limit of one teen passenger is important when teens are just learning to drive," said Foss.

This study is one of the first to use in-vehicle cameras to observe teen driver and passenger behavior in real-time. Using video recorders from two lenses – one facing the roadway and the other into the vehicle – researchers were able to measure potentially distracted behaviors more accurately than in previous studies, which have relied on observation from outside vehicles or driver self-reports of distracted behaviors.

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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