

# Tighten teens' nighttime driving restrictions: CDC

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(HealthDay)—Getting U.S. teens out of the driver's seat before midnight

would reduce their risk of fatal crashes, federal health officials said Thursday in a new report.

One-third of fatal teen car crashes occur at [night](#), with 57 percent of those taking place before 12 a.m., according to new statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But while 49 states restrict nighttime driving as part of a graduated licensing program, 23 prohibit driving only after midnight—well past the time most teens are off the road, the CDC reported.

"Restrictions that start at 12 a.m. or later aren't really protective," said lead author Ruth Shults, a senior epidemiologist in the division of unintentional injury prevention at the CDC. They "aren't providing protection for the majority of teen drivers who are out at night."

According to the newly reported 2009-2014 statistics, 31 percent of drivers aged 16 and 17 in [fatal crashes](#) had them between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. And almost three out of five of these collisions occurred between 9 p.m. and midnight.

Driving after dark raises the risk for fatal crashes across all age groups. But "driving at night is especially challenging for teens because of their inexperience, so every state except Vermont has nighttime driving restrictions," said Shults.

However, just 26 states want young drivers off the road before midnight, the CDC reported.

Shults believes that state legislatures should revisit their approach to nighttime driving laws and recast them using the latest data.

"The research to date suggests that [restriction starting at] 10 p.m. or

earlier definitely saves lives and reduces injury," she said.

Another expert agrees that night driving bans should start a lot earlier.

"Nighttime restrictions should begin earlier in the evening—that's when the bulk of crashes occur," said Dr. Robert Glatter, an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

Distracted driving and smartphones account for a high percentage of the crashes, in addition to alcohol, "which is always an issue," he said.

Restrictions should start at sundown, "that's when the problems start with night driving," Glatter said.

Kansas, New York and North Carolina start their nighttime teen driving restrictions at 9 p.m., but all the others start later, the researchers found.

Part of the reason for allowing teens on the road later is to accommodate those who work, play sports or engage in other activities at night, Shults said.

States, however, can have exemptions for those reasons while restricting other nighttime driving, she suggested.

The risk for night crashes is increased by drinking or distractions from teen passengers, Shults said. In addition, teens may not use seatbelts as much at night, which makes the odds of serious injury or death more likely.

Parents of newly licensed teens need to be familiar with requirements of the graduated driver licensing system, Shults said.

"Families are free to set that restriction earlier if they feel 9 or 11 is too

late," she said. "Young people need many hours of driving at night before they are proficient, so parents should spend as many hours as they can riding along in the car with that teen driver at night."

The report was published July 29 in the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

**More information:** For more on teen driving, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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