

Laws banning hand-held cellphone calls more effective than texting bans for teen drivers

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A new study led by the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital used data from a national survey to examine the effectiveness of state-level cellphone laws in decreasing

teens' use of cellphones while driving. The study, done in conjunction with researchers from West Virginia University and the University of Minnesota, and published today in *Journal of Adolescent Health*, looked at state-level cellphone laws and differences in both texting and hand-held cellphone conversations among teen drivers across four years.

The study found differences in the effectiveness of the laws for [teen drivers](#)' cellphone use based on the type of ban - hand-held phone conversations or [texting](#) - as well as whether the ban applied to [young drivers](#) or all drivers (universal). Teen drivers reported 55% fewer hand-held phone conversations when universal hand-held calling bans were in place compared to state with no bans. Universal texting bans did not fully discourage teens from texting while driving. Bans limited to just young drivers were not effective in reducing either hand-held conversations or texting. Even with laws in place, about one-third of [teen drivers](#) are still talking on the phone and texting while driving.

"Our study shows that universal bans of hand-held cellphone calls while driving can be effective in reducing teens' hand-held conversations while driving, but texting bans are not effective in reducing texting while driving," said Motao Zhu, MD, MS, PhD, the study's lead author and Principal Investigator in the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "Nearly all states ban texting while driving, however, these bans are not effective. More states should implement hand-held cellphone bans, which have been proven to discourage hand-held cellphone conversations while driving."

While the causes for the differences in laws and behavior are unknown, these relationships may be attributed to actual or perceived enforcement of these laws. For example, it may be easier for police to enforce universal hand-held bans because they don't need to judge a driver's age from afar and can more easily identify a driver holding a phone to his ear than using a phone in his lap. Drivers may also feel an officer would

be able to identify them holding a phone to their ear than texting in their lap.

While enacting and enforcing cellphone laws is one way to curtail these behaviors, it may not be the only solution. Cellphone use while driving is a complex social phenomenon, especially for teens and young adults. More work needs to be done not only to develop and enforce effective laws but also to develop and implement best practices for preventing [cellphone](#)-related driving injuries, which may include behavior change programs, education, and/or interventions.

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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