

Distracted driving more frequent among millennial than older parents

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According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, nine people are killed and more than 1,000 injured each day in incidents involving a distracted driver. Texting while driving is a modern safety

crisis associated with increased risk of motor vehicle crashes and may underlie the recent rise of motor vehicle fatalities in the United States. Motor vehicle crashes are a top cause of death for children and young adults.

Known for their significant cell phone and [technology use](#), many millennials (born 1981-1996) are now young [parents](#). Investigators from Brigham and Women's Hospital sought to understand and compare the [texting](#) and driving patterns of millennial parents versus older parents. They found that texting while driving was common among both groups and conclude that there may be opportunities to intervene to prevent distracted driving. The team's results are published in *JAMA Pediatrics*.

"My hope is that we can find solutions that prevent deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes; when patients arrive in our emergency departments and operating rooms, it is often too late," said Regan Bergmark, MD, a sinus and endoscopic skull base surgeon at the Brigham, research faculty at the Center for Surgery and Public Health, and lead author on the study.

Researchers completed a cross-sectional national survey of 435 parents with a validated survey instrument, the Distracted Driving Survey (DDS). The survey included questions about [text message](#) reading and writing; use of email, social media and maps while driving; and speed while performing these tasks. Millennials had higher DDS scores than did older parents, reflecting more reckless behavior. Millennial parents were more likely to read text messages than older parents, but there was no difference for writing texts or for crash rates between the two groups.

"We found that millennial-aged parents reported riskier distracted driving behavior than older parents, although distraction was prevalent in both age groups," said Bergmark. "We found that most parents, regardless of age, reported reading and writing texts while driving in the

past month."

Less than a quarter of all parents surveyed reported either being asked by their child's pediatrician about texting and driving or using an app or program to limit texting and driving. The authors conclude that both are areas for potential intervention.

"I think parents likely know the risks of distracted driving. More than half of parents surveyed said they believe they are safer drivers when their kids are in the car, and two-thirds said they use their phone less when they have their kids in the car," said Bergmark. "We believe there is an opportunity to change behavior by engaging with parents more directly through their children's pediatrician about distracted driving and having apps or programs that people can commit to using.

"Parents may be worried about being unreachable in emergencies, but this should be a challenge technology can help solve."

More information: *JAMA Pediatrics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.0830](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.0830)

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