

Researchers recommend bans on cellphone use for young drivers

December 3 2020



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In the United States, teen drivers are disproportionately at risk for motor vehicle crashes, even though they account for the lowest percentage of licensed drivers on the road. One common risky driving behavior both

teens and adults engage in is cellphone use. A new study conducted by researchers at the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital analyzed the association between cellphone laws and the prevalence of talking on a phone while driving among teen drivers by using data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveys from 2013 through 2019.

The study, published today in *Injury Epidemiology*, found that over half (53%) of study participants reported talking on their cellphone while driving at least once during the last month. However, the percentage varied widely depending on the type of cellphone ban in the state: no ban, young driver cellphone ban, or handheld ban for drivers of all ages.

Students from states that had both a young driver cellphone ban and a handheld ban for all drivers were 19% less likely to engage in talking on the phone while driving than students in states with no bans and 23% less likely to engage in this [behavior](#) than students from states with only young driver cellphone bans.

The prevalence of talking on a phone while driving was highest among older students and lowest for younger students. About 41% of students aged 18 and older sometimes (1-9 days/month) engaged in talking on the phone while driving and 22% of them frequently (10 to 30 days/month) engaged in the behavior, compared to 22% sometimes and 7% frequently among students aged 15 years old. A higher prevalence of white students (60%) talked on the phone at least once while driving compared to students of other races/ethnicities (42% for Black or African American students, and 45% for Hispanic students).

"Talking on a cellphone while driving is a common but risky behavior among [teen drivers](#)," said Motao Zhu, MD, MS, Ph.D., lead author of the study and principal investigator in the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's. "States with both a handheld calling

ban for all ages and a ban on all [cellphone use](#) for young drivers had a lower prevalence of young drivers talking on the phone while driving. We encourage states to consider implementing both types of bans to normalize distraction-free driving and promote a safer driving culture for everyone on the road."

As driving is a learned behavior, parents and guardians are the primary role models for teen drivers and contribute to their overall traffic safety culture. This provides a strong argument for handheld calling bans, regardless of driver age, to prevent sending teens mixed messages about cellphone use while driving based on age or experience. Pediatricians can discuss avoidance of distracted driving with teens during yearly physical exams. Promotion of safer alternatives such as hands-free options or technology which blocks cellular use while driving (e.g., "Do Not Disturb" mode), should be recommended as [motor vehicle crashes](#) remain a leading cause of injury and death for teens. Although young driver bans target a population of vulnerable road users, legislative efforts that acknowledge unsafe driving behavior irrespective of age will promote a safer driving culture and will translate into safer roads for all [drivers](#).

Data for this study were obtained from the state Youth Risk Behavior Surveys (YRBSs), which are repeated cross-sectional surveys using a two-stage cluster sample design. State YRBSs are anonymous, voluntary surveys conducted every two years to obtain a representative sample of ninth through twelfth grade students attending public school. Data on state [cellphone](#) laws were obtained from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (Cellphone use laws by state 2019) and the LexisNexis Academic database.

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

Citation: Researchers recommend bans on cellphone use for young drivers (2020, December 3) retrieved 7 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-cellphone-young-drivers.html>

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