

Speeding on U.S. roads is taking thousands of teenagers' lives

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(HealthDay)—Nearly half—43%—of all fatal car crashes involving

teens and their passengers are the result of speeding, a new automobile safety report reveals.

The finding stems from an in-depth analysis of all fatal motor vehicle accidents across the United States between 2015 and 2019. During this five-year period, 4,930 [teen drivers](#) and passengers died in crashes involving speeding.

And while the report acknowledges that deadly speeding is a problem at any age, it warns that the consequences of speeding pose a particularly grave danger to [young drivers](#) between the ages of 16 and 19.

"We have a culture of speeding in this country," said Pam Fischer. She's senior director of external engagement for the Washington, D.C.-based Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), which represents highway safety offices across all U.S. states and territories.

Although the period studied did not include the pandemic, GHSA executive director Jonathan Adkins said in a statement that the United States "has a speeding problem that has only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic."

According to Adkins, "Thousands of people die needlessly on our roads because some [drivers](#) mistakenly think less traffic means they can speed and nothing bad will happen. The data tell us that teen drivers are the most likely to be tempted to speed, so the need to address this issue is more critical than ever, given traffic death trends during the pandemic."

Fischer noted that wide acceptance of speeding means that, in practice, many drivers view [speed](#) limits as minimums rather than maximums. As a result, speeding has become a "national pandemic," she said.

Fischer puts it down to a simple equation: Inexperience plus immaturity

plus speeding equals deadly accidents.

As the GHSA report itself noted, "teen drivers do not have the experience necessary to recognize and quickly react appropriately to dangerous situations, which makes speeding even riskier for them."

Fischer presented the findings Thursday during an online meeting with a panel of safety experts, including: Violet Marrero, consumer safety director for NJM Insurance Group, a leading car insurance company; Rick Birt, president and CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD); and Linda Fech, teen driver safety program coordinator for the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning in Lansing, Mich.

The study found that teen drivers who died in a speeding accident were more likely to be male (37% versus 28%), and were more likely to not be wearing a seatbelt. Teen fatalities also tended to involve being run off the road and/or car rollovers.

Younger teens (16- to 17-year-olds) were found to be at the highest risk for a deadly speeding crash. But teens aged 18 and 19 were more likely to get into an accident between midnight and 5 a.m. Older teens were also more likely to have accidents while on a highway or freeway.

And when it comes to speeding fatalities when passengers were in the car, more was decidedly worse: The greater the number of teenagers in the car alongside a teen driver, the greater the risk for a deadly speeding accident.

Still, everyone on the panel, and the report itself, placed an emphasis on practical steps that can be taken to rein in teenage speeding risk. The first step is increased parental involvement.

For example, speaking to the need to model good driving behavior, Marrero said that "it's so important for parents to become aware of their role and understand how much influence, how much power they have."

Driving schools are a good and necessary "foundation" that can help ensure that teens acquire excellent driving skills. "But driving school is not enough," she said. "Parents have responsibilities."

Those responsibilities include parents not driving aggressively themselves, never speeding, always obeying traffic signs and laws, never driving while intoxicated, and never using cellphones while behind the wheel, Marrero explained. Surveys suggest that many "parents don't realize they've been demonstrating all these terrible behaviors," she noted.

Fischer agreed, adding that she "cannot overstate the role of the parents."

At the same time, several panel members cautioned that parents need to be honest with themselves as to the limits of their own driving skills, as well as that of their teens. Not every excellent parental driver is an excellent driving teacher, they cautioned, and not all [teens](#) are equally equipped to start driving safely at a young age.

To that point, Fischer and the report stressed the potential [safety](#) benefits of embracing "graduated driver licensing," which is state-imposed license restrictions dictating when and where young new drivers can get behind the wheel unsupervised. Those restrictions lift over time.

Other options put on the table included: employing technology to afford parents options for monitoring their teen drivers in real-time; smart ignition keys designed to limit the top allowable speeds; and "belt minders" that mute in-car audio speakers until teen drivers and their passengers buckle up. Parent-teen driving agreements and peer-to-peer

education programs were also highlighted as ways to reduce risk.

More information: There's more on the dangers of speeding at the [GHSA](#).

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