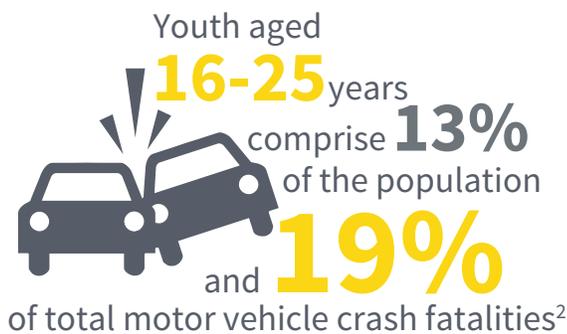


# Injury Insight

## Young drivers: a population at risk

Many youth look forward to getting their driver's license because driving means greater mobility, freedom and independence. While it is an exciting time, learning to drive can also be stressful for teens and their parents. Driving is a complex skill, requiring both practice and maturity in order to learn to operate a motor vehicle safely. Unfortunately, making a mistake can result in serious injury or death. Young, inexperienced drivers under the age of 25<sup>1</sup> have long been recognized as particularly high risk road users.

Fatality and hospitalization rates among youth aged 16-25 years are higher compared to other age groups. Fatality rates of drivers are second highest among younger drivers aged 16-25 years after drivers aged 76 years and over.<sup>2</sup>



Driver inexperience, driving without due care, overestimation of ability, thrill-seeking and risk-taking all play a role in the high rate of youth crashes. Young drivers are also at risk of distraction, especially with passengers and electronic gadgets in the car. When they drive at night, the risk of crashing is greater.

### Purpose of insight

The purpose of this insight is to investigate the circumstances around teen driver deaths in BC.

## EACH YEAR<sup>3</sup> BC YOUTH (AGES 16-21) EXPERIENCE



## Teen driver deaths in BC, 2004-2012<sup>4</sup>

A review of deaths in BC among drivers and motorcyclists aged 18 years and under, between 2004-2012, was conducted in order to understand more about the circumstances that typically lead to these events. Ninety-eight cases of drivers and motorcyclists aged 18 years and under who

Main factors associated with fatal collisions, British Columbia, 2004-2012

Age	90% of drivers were 17-18 years of age
Sex	Over 70% of drivers were male
Speed	45.9% of drivers were speeding, many in a 50-60km/h zone, and approximately a third of these were traveling at over 90km/h
Impairment	49% of drivers were impaired
Nighttime Driving	Nearly 40% of collisions occurred at night
Restraint use	Nearly 30% of drivers were not wearing a seatbelt

### Concerns that need more research

Passengers	Approximately 1/3 of drivers were traveling with 1 or more passengers, potentially in violation the GLP
Vehicle Age	46.9% of drivers were operating a vehicle that was 10 or more years old
Distraction	Over 13% of drivers were distracted



In BC, the GLP has dramatically reduced collisions,<sup>7</sup> yet deaths still occur, indicating that more needs to be done to prevent these tragedies.

Research shows that the period of supervised driving is the safest for young and new drivers.<sup>7</sup> In addition, driving with a passenger older than 35 years of age reduces the risk of a collision by 62%.<sup>7</sup> Parents/supervisors can use this opportunity to reinforce safety messages about seatbelt use, speeding, drinking and driving, as well as pulling over to use electronic devices.

died in a collision were reviewed in depth. Non-identifying demographic details about the driver, as well as details about the environment and how the collision occurred were collected and analyzed.<sup>2</sup>

CRASHES INVOLVING YOUTH 15-24 COST

**\$96**   
**MILLION** per year

**OVER 25% OF THE TOTAL COST**  
OF ALL OCCUPANT CRASHES IN BC<sup>5</sup>

### Preventing young driver deaths

Currently, every province and territory in Canada has implemented some form of a graduated licensing program (GLP). The purpose of any GLP is to introduce the new driver to driving in stages that increase in complexity. Drivers typically start in a learning stage, which requires supervision by a more experienced driver. In later stages of the program, drivers progress with fewer restrictions until graduation to full licensure.

**Speeding** is the<sup>8</sup>  
**leading** cause of  
**fatalities**  
among youth aged **16-24**  
years

 **27%**  
of youth fatalities<sup>8</sup>  
were due to **impairment**  
and **23%**  
were due to **distraction** 

Ontario's road safety track record is impressive. In spite of being the most populous province or territory in Canada, Ontario has consistently reported some of the lowest fatality rates (per billion km traveled) in North America.<sup>9</sup> Policy and lawmakers need to look to those jurisdictions that perform better than our own for ways to improve the framework that protects young drivers.

Health care  
**costs** in BC  
for motor vehicle injuries are  
**\$126** per youth  
aged 15-24 years<sup>6</sup>

Future research to explore why youth continue to be injured or killed in collisions that involve excess speed, impairment and nighttime driving would be useful.

Youth advocates and community leaders can help by supporting law enforcement efforts, accessibility to public transit or safe drive programs, and availability of programs for youth on alcohol and drug counseling.

The BC Provincial Health Officer recommends that for new drivers, an extension be made of the required zero blood alcohol content beyond completion of the Graduated Licensing Program to age 25.<sup>2</sup>

## RESOURCES

-  [Information about licensing for teens and parents in BC](#)
-  [Information about solutions for risks to young drivers in Canada](#)
-  [Research on improving graduated licensing programs in North America](#)
-  [Where the Rubber Meets the Road: Reducing the Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes on Health and Well-being in BC: Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report 2011.](#)



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