

# Ohio State Highway Patrol

## Monthly Commander's Column



### **With Prom and Graduation right around the corner, Patrol debunks teen driving myths**

If you are a teen driver, this month I am writing to you. If you are the parent or guardian of a teen, please make sure you share this article with that young person. If you are a high school teacher – Post this article in your classroom. With prom and graduation season right around the corner, the time to share this information is now.

This is an exciting time for high school students, as well as friends and family, taking part in all of the festivities surrounding memorable events in a teenager's life such as prom and graduation. This time of celebration can easily turn to a time of tragedy because teens may be tempted to drink or use other substances that impair their abilities at after-prom parties and graduation celebrations.

Even if you manage to avoid the tragedy of a serious motor vehicle crash, driving impaired has serious consequences. If you are under 21 years of age and are caught driving with a blood alcohol concentration between .02 percent and .08 percent, a level that can be reached after just one or two drinks, you can be arrested. Punishment is suspension of your driver license for at least 90 days up to a maximum of two years, plus four points added to your driving record. Having an open container of alcohol in a motor vehicle is also illegal.

In addition to the threat of underage drinking, teens are also at a point where they have significantly more freedom and spend more time in motor vehicles attending social events, rather than just traveling to and from school activities, which could lead to other dangerous behaviors. Between 2006 and 2008, speed was a factor in 58 percent of the crashes that were caused by juvenile drivers. During this three-year period, juvenile drivers were at fault in 61,784 traffic crashes, resulting in 27,838 injuries and 212 deaths on Ohio roadways.

Driving a motor vehicle is about responsibility, awareness, and safety. Teenagers are constantly looking for respect, and want people to trust them. So our message for teens is:

You want people to trust you? Go the speed limit. Wear your safety belt. Don't consume alcohol underage, and never get behind the wheel impaired.

Be aware of whose lives are in your hands – literally, when you are in control of the car.

As parents and teens are considering these safety issues, I want to debunk some commonly held myths about teen driving. I did not make any of these myths up – they all came directly from teen drivers.

**Myth #1:** Traffic crashes are random, isolated events that cannot be prevented.

**Fact:** Specific behaviors are associated with the cause of teen traffic crashes. Inexperience and immaturity combined with speed, alcohol-related driving, not wearing safety belts, distracted driving (cell phone use, loud music, other teen passengers, etc.), drowsy driving, nighttime driving, and other drug use to contribute to the high percentage of teen crashes and preventable deaths. (Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

**Myth #2:** Teens are safer with more passengers in the car to help watch traffic.

**Fact:** Crash risk for teenage drivers increases incrementally with 1, 2, or 3 or more passengers. With 3 or more, fatal crash risk is about 3 times higher than when a beginner is driving alone.

The presence of passengers is a major contributor to the teenage death toll. About two-thirds of all crash deaths of teens that involve 16-year-old drivers occur when the beginners were driving with teen passengers. (Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

**Myth #3:** I don't need to wear a safety belt because I'm not going far and I won't be going fast.

**Fact:** Most crash deaths occur within 25 miles of home and at speeds of less than 40 miles per hour. This emphasizes that everyday driving from just one neighbor's home to another, to school or to the store poses the greatest danger. Always buckle up. (Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)

**Myth #4:** Texting while driving is safer than talking on a cell phone while driving.

**Fact:** Texting while driving takes the driver's attention away from the road, which can lead to crashes. A recent study found that text messaging while driving causes a 400 percent increase in time spent with eyes off the road. No one should have to worry that other drivers are focused on texting instead of traffic. (Source: American Medical Association)

You only have one chance to be aware of all your surroundings when you are driving. Don't ruin that one chance and take the risk of ending your life and someone else's. Driving irresponsibly or under the influence can have life altering consequences.

We want everyone to have a safe and fun prom and graduation season. Please take this message to heart and share it with any teen drivers in your family or circle of friends.

*An internationally accredited agency whose mission is to save lives, investigate crime  
and enforce the law with compassion and unbiased professionalism.*