

Young drivers



- Crash risk is highest in the first 6–12 months of solo driving due to driver inexperience.
- Young new drivers have the highest risk due to developmental factors.
- Only 13.7% of the driver/rider population in Queensland is aged 16-24 years, but young drivers/riders account for a quarter of all driver/rider fatalities¹.

State of the Road A Fact Sheet of the Centre for Accident Research & Road Safety - Queensland (CARRS-Q)

THE FACTS

Who is a young driver?

- Young drivers are teenagers and young adults who are new to the experience of driving on the road. In the Australian context, this generally applies from age 16 years when learner licensure is first allowed through to the mid-20s, when most provisional licence conditions no longer apply.

Young drivers at risk

- Young drivers have high rates of involvement in road crashes in Australia and worldwide². While these rates have improved in recent years, young drivers still continue to be highly represented.
- For young drivers and motorcycle riders in Queensland in 2018¹:
 - 13.7% of the licensed population was aged 16-24 years.
 - 24.9% of all driver/rider fatalities on the road was aged 16-24 years.
 - Young drivers/riders with a provisional (P1/P2) licence had a higher involvement in fatal crashes than learners and open licensed drivers/riders.
 - Young males were overrepresented in crash fatalities.

Why are young drivers at risk?

Inexperience

- Crash rates are highest in the early months of transition to solo driving, known as the “provisional” licence period in Queensland (Figure 1), which typically occurs at a young age.
- New drivers are more likely to make driving errors because they are still developing the complex skills associated with safer, more defensive driving³.

- Young new drivers can find themselves in riskier circumstances because they can overestimate their driving skills, while under-estimating risks and hazards associated with the road environment and their driving behaviour⁴.

Adolescent development

- Healthy adolescent development includes structural changes in the brain that impact on perceptions of risk, control of attention and emotions, sleep patterns and influences of peers in ways that increase risky driving. See CARRS-Q Adolescent Risk-Taking Fact Sheet.

Lifestyle factors

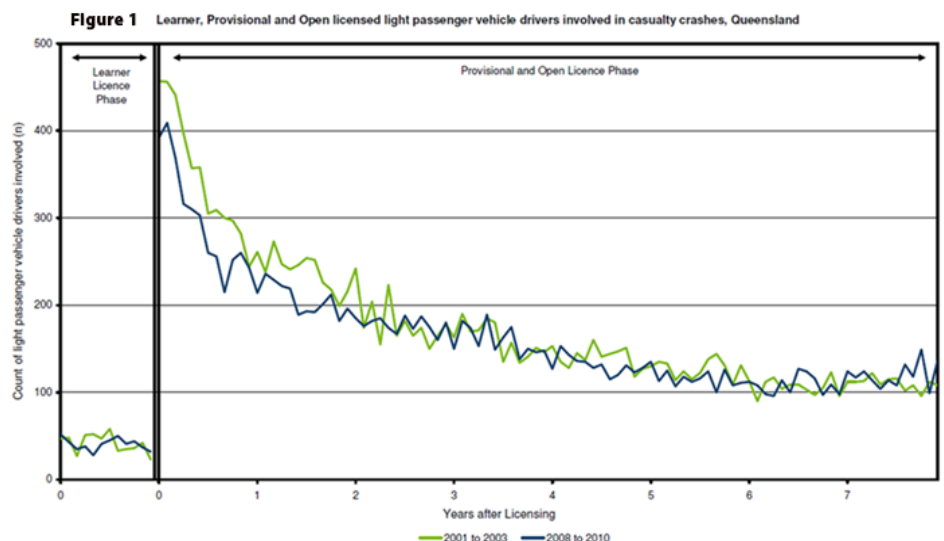
- Young people drive in high risk travel times – particularly at night, on the weekend and for recreational reasons - more than older adults.
- Developmentally, young people need more sleep, so juggling competing commitments to study, work, spend time with family and friends, can make young drivers vulnerable to fatigue.

- Young people more often drive with peer passengers and are more accepting of mobile phone use while driving, which increase their crash risk due to distractions.

What can young people and parents do to help young drivers stay safe?

Licensing

- Follow the road rules and licensing regulations. Graduated licensing systems, which phase drivers into higher risk circumstances over time (from learner to provisional to open licence in Queensland), are among the most successful initiatives in reducing young driver crash risk as they gain experience and maturity^{6,7}.
- Stagger professional driving lessons throughout the learner period, including as the first lesson if this will help build driver-supervisor confidence. In Queensland, the first 10 hours of professional lessons count as 30 hours in the learner logbook.



- In the **learner** period, aim for over 100 hours of supervised driving, increasing into more complex situations and scenarios over time, including at night and with other passengers. It takes about 15 hours⁸ to learn the basics and then more complexity can be introduced over time to include common distractions (e.g. areas with lots of signage or pedestrians).
- In the early months of the **provisional** licence, start with no non-adult passengers and no night driving (the highest risks) until gaining experience in solo driving. Parents should aim to join the ride when first driving in unfamiliar circumstances (e.g. extreme weather, unfamiliar roads).
- Avoid group advanced driving courses as these can be risky for young drivers in the early years of developing their on-road experience and instincts. Programs to improve hazard perception skills or develop better insights and resilience are more likely to offer benefits⁹.

Behaviour

- Young new drivers especially need to avoid risky behaviours and parents should role model safe behaviours to demonstrate the importance of not speeding, drink driving, drug driving, driving while sleepy or fatigued, using mobile phones while driving, and to wear seat belts.
- Aim to follow a 3 seconds rule to maintain a safe distance between your car and the one in front. Young new drivers need longer than experienced drivers to allow time to react to unexpected situations.
- Young new drivers especially need to remember to pay attention to what is happening on and around the road and to

scan far ahead. Road and traffic conditions can change within seconds and new drivers can focus too much just on the vehicle in front.

- Young drivers should never use or respond to a phone while driving, even if it's their parents calling and even if hands-free – agree on how to manage this and check the fines for mobile phone use while driving in Queensland.

Fatigue

- Prevent fatigued driving by aiming for sufficient sleep and allowing a sleep-in when possible.
- Only drive during usual waking hours. Plan ahead to avoid driving after long work or study sessions.
- Agree on alternative arrangements (e.g. parent or another driver) for when young drivers are likely to be fatigued.
- Take regular breaks and stop for 15-minute power naps every two hours, or less if feeling weary.
- See more tips here.

Car selection

- Prioritise car sharing or a car purchase decision based on safety features. Sharing a car with parents has been shown to be much safer when first driving solo, partly because it is usually a newer and safer car.
- Research the safety of a new car or second hand car before buying. Consider buying the newest vehicle with a 5-star rating that meets your budget – a brand new car might offer less safety than one a little older for the same cost.

- Maintain the car regularly and remember to check controls and do a walk around now and then to make sure everything is working and tyres (including pressure and tread depth) are in good condition.

Planning ahead

- Think ahead when making travel plans, choosing the safest way to get there and return. Sometimes the best plan is not to drive at all – such as if planning to drink alcohol or needing to travel late at night.
- Before you drive, think about the trip. Consider parking, potential risks, and strategies for avoiding risks. Allow extra time for uncertainties to avoid potential for being late and temptation to speed.
- At the time of the drive, think about factors like fatigue level and emotional state. Should you drive now after all or go for a back-up option?

CARRS-Q RECENT WORK IN THIS AREA

CARRS-Q continues to be a leader within the domain of road safety for young drivers.

- Young drivers' engagement with mobile phones when driving^{2,10,11}.
- The use of gamification to foster safer driving behaviours in young males¹¹.
- Young drivers representation in sleep related crashes¹².
- Young drivers' responses to anti-speeding advertisements¹³.
- Young male drivers' deterrence perception¹⁴.
- Enhancing education programs for young drivers with driving simulators¹⁵.

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