

## Let's keep teen drivers safe this holiday season

BY **JULEYKA LANTIGUA-WILLIAMS**  
The Progressive Media Project

This holiday season, parents must be especially vigilant to keep their teens safe on the road.

Car crashes are the No. 1 killer of teens in our country. Three thousand young lives are lost every year to careless driving, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Teens are four times more likely than older drivers to be involved in car crashes. And because many teens will have a lot of spare time on their hands over the holidays, parents have to monitor and restrict their driving.

Being a responsible parent means learning the risks involved in allowing your teenager to take the reins of the family car.

Nighttime fatal crash rates for 16-year-olds are nearly twice as high as daytime rates, says the CDC. In 2008, 20 percent of teen deaths happened between 9 p.m. and midnight, and 24 percent between midnight and 6 a.m., according to the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety.

What's more, using a cell phone while driving greatly increases the odds of a crash.

And many teens will also be tempted to drive while under the influence of alcohol this holiday season, which can be a fatal decision.

So here are a few things you, as a parent, should do:

1. Sit with your son or daughter before and after he or she earns a driver's permit or license. Discuss the dangers involved and have a frank conversation about the consequences — those you will impose and those a judge will impose.

2. Get in the car and observe your child's driving. The CDC recommends providing 30 to 50 hours of supervised driving practice for at least six months after a teen gets his or her license. Teach your young driver how to handle a vehicle in different weather conditions and under changing traffic circumstances.

3. Sign a written agreement that details all the rights and privileges, as well as consequences, your teen will be sub-

ject to in exchange for the car keys. The CDC has a useful template on its website.

4. Consider prohibiting nighttime driving, or at least set a driving curfew of 10 p.m. at the latest.

5. Restrict the number of passengers to one or none.

6. Take away the keys if you even suspect your child has been drinking and driving.

7. Take away the cell phone if your child has been calling or texting while driving.

Your best gift to yourself is to make sure you have your child around to celebrate the holidays with you next year.

Juleyka Lantigua-Williams writes about current issues for The Progressive Media Project.



JIM FARQUHAR/STAFF

