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GAITHERSBURG STUDY FINDS TEENS MAKE BETTER DRIVERS IF THEY AGREE WITH THEIR PARENTS ON BASIC DRIVING RULES

Study finds mothers are better at dealing with teen driving rules than fathers

WASHINGTON, DC, October 18, 2005-- Boys are more likely to be risky drivers than girls in the first month of getting their driving licenses, and mothers are better than fathers in getting their teenagers to avoid risky driving, according to a study of 579 families in Gaithersburg, MD.

Published in the September issue of *Prevention Science*, which was released today, the study also found that the best way to reduce risky driving is for parents and teenagers to have agreement on driving conditions and consequences for unsafe driving.

Study author Kenneth H. Beck, Ph.D., Department of Public and Community Health at the University of Maryland, College Park, found that teenagers are likely to be risky drivers if there is “discord” between parents and teenagers on basic driving conditions, such as driving with or without parents, driving outside of local areas, or driving without telling the parent where the teenager is going.

“Parents and teenagers also need to have agreement on the consequences for risky driving. Both need to know and agree as to when driving privileges would be taken away or reduced. And the best way to do that is talk about it.” Beck said.

He said the most common risky teen driving behaviors in suburban Washington, DC, are “going through an intersection when the light was turning yellow (83.8%); exceeding the speed limit in residential or school zones (50.3%); reading, eating, talking on a cell phone or horsing around with other passengers while driving (47.5%); and switching lanes and weaving through slower traffic (45.8%).”

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and injury among adolescents between the ages of 16 and 20. Adolescent crash rates are higher than those of any other age group and are higher when teens drive on weekends, with teen passengers and at night time, according to federal studies cited by Beck. His research was funded by the Maryland Department of Transportation and done in collaboration with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

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Teen Driving/ add one

While many teenagers take driving lessons and get drivers' education classes in school, a growing body of research indicates that parents can also play a crucial role in reducing the level of teen driving. Studies have found that teens who report high levels of parental monitoring and driving restrictions are less likely to engage in a variety of risky driving behaviors.

Beck's study recruited 579 families who had a teenager that had received a driver's license in the previous 30 days. Most of the adolescents were living in families with biological parents, were predominantly white, with parents having full time jobs and a four-year college education.

"While our study focused on a fairly affluent and educated segment of the Washington, DC market, the results have applicability for similar suburbs in many parts of the country," Beck said.

The adolescent and the accompanying parent were asked to participate in a safety program about newly licensed adolescent drivers. As teens completed paperwork for their driving licenses, parents completed a baseline survey. One month later, parents and their teens were contacted by telephone and interviewed separately for about 20 minutes. Participation in the study was voluntary.

Prevention Science is published by the Society for Prevention Research, an international organization focused on the advancement of science-based prevention programs and policies through empirical research. The membership of the organization includes scientists, practitioners, advocates, administrators and policymakers who are concerned with the prevention of social, physical and mental health problems and the promotion of health, safety and well being.

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