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American Academy of Pediatrics

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Graduated Driver Licensing

The Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AzAAP) supports improvements in the Graduated Driver Licensing laws for teen drivers.

Although teen drivers make up only 2.5 % of Arizona drivers, they account for 8 percent of crashes that result in death or serious injury. According to AAA Arizona, 72 lives were lost in 2003 due to crashes in which teens were driving.

The recommended changes to the GDL program would include limits on the number of teen passengers and limits on night driving during the time that a novice teen driver is still learning driving skills. With two passengers, crash rates are twice as high as when the driver is alone. When 3 or more passengers are present, crash rates are 4 times higher. For the first 6 months after getting a provisional license, teens should be limited to one passenger.

Crash rates per mile driven are higher at night than in the daytime for all drivers, but this problem is especially bad for young teen drivers. Since 58% of crashes occur between 9 PM and midnight, we suggest that the most inexperienced drivers should be limited to driving before 9 PM. With older age and more driving experience, this limitation could be relaxed. As stated by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, "the intention is not to deny essential driving at night, but to limit high-risk recreational driving". For this reason, an exception to the night restriction for driving to and from school, church activities, or a job would be acceptable.

Since it is quite unusual for a novice driver to have a crash during the supervised learning period, the AzAAP feels the learner permit stage can remain at the current 15 years and 7 months. It has been shown that novice drivers who have had extensive periods of supervised driving practice tend to have fewer crashes once they enter the unsupervised phase of the GDL progression. A minimum of 40 hours (at least 10 at night) of supervised driving prior to getting the class G license is recommended.

Penalties for speeding and reckless driving should be very strict for novice drivers. We support license suspension after the second violation rather than after the third violation as is currently the law.

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