

Public Health Practice Stories from the Field

CO

Statewide alliance

formed to reduce teen motor vehicle crashes and improve teen motor vehicle safety

Public and private partners

supported the implementation of a stronger, science-based graduated driver licensing law, using consistent and coordinated messaging

62% reduction

achieved in the state's teen motor vehicle death rate from 2004 to 2010

CO Winnable Battles

now include motor vehicle safety as a key priority to advance by 2016

Colorado Reduces Teen Driving Fatalities Using Science to Inform the Policy Process

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among US teenagers. Per mile driven, fatal crash rates for teen drivers aged 16–19 years are nearly three times higher than for drivers aged 20 years or older.

In 1999, Colorado began implementing its first graduated driver licensing (GDL) law to help address teen motor vehicle safety in the state. However, from 2000 to 2004, death rates did not go down as expected. Instead, Colorado's teen motor vehicle death rate increased over that period from 22.8 to 31.9 per 100,000 teens aged 15–19 years.

This prompted Colorado to examine the [science base \(summarized on CDC's Teen Driving website\)](#) and eventually strengthen its GDL law. Effective July 1, 2005, the new law

1. Raised the learner's permit age to 16, unless a teen takes a driver education course at age 15 or passes a 4-hour driver awareness course at age 15½
2. Lengthened the supervised driving stage to 12 months
3. Introduced intermediate license restrictions, prohibiting teen drivers from having passengers under age 21 for the first 6 months of licensure and limiting passengers to one person under age 21 during the second 6 months
4. Made the seat belt law primary for teen drivers and their passengers, thereby allowing law enforcement officers to ticket teen drivers or their passengers for not wearing seat belts in the absence of any other traffic offense
5. Maintained the teen driver nighttime driving restriction between midnight and 5 am

After the GDL law was strengthened, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment convened the Colorado Teen Driving Alliance (CTDA) to align implementation efforts by statewide agencies and advocates for teen driving safety. A public-private partnership of state and local partners, CTDA aims to continue reducing teen motor vehicle crashes and improving teen motor vehicle safety.

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What We Did

After the GDL law was strengthened to reflect the best available science, CTDA

- Developed outreach materials to educate parents, teens, and law enforcement about the GDL law
- Created a [website \(www.coteedriver.com\)](http://www.coteedriver.com) targeted at parents, teens, and safety advocates (e.g., local public health departments, law enforcement, schools) to house GDL outreach materials; all CTDA members promote the website, ensuring consistent messaging across partner activities
- Provided technical assistance to local communities implementing teen driving safety programs
- Developed a local motor vehicle policy action plan template for local public health departments and local teen driving safety coalitions
- Provided education about ways Colorado can strengthen its motor vehicle safety laws to align with best practices, including implementation of a cell phone/texting ban for teens enacted in 2009

CTDA continues to meet monthly to coordinate state-level efforts to implement evidence-based strategies to improve teen driving safety. CTDA members include the state's health department, Department of Transportation, Department of Motor Vehicles, and State Patrol, as well as AAA Colorado, Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association, Children's Hospital Colorado, Safe Kids Colorado, Drive Smart Colorado, State Farm, Swedish Hospital, Denver Public Health, Jefferson County Public Health, Pueblo City/County Health Department, driving schools, and others.

What We Accomplished

From 2004 to 2010, the Colorado teen motor vehicle death rate decreased from 31.9 to 12.1 per 100,000 teens aged 15–19. This 62% reduction was due, in part, to Colorado's strengthening the GDL law and the CTDA's efforts to support its implementation.

- Motor vehicle safety was named as one of Colorado's Winnable Battles; specifically, by 2016, Colorado aims to 1) decrease teen motor vehicle death rates to 10.5 per 100,000 teens aged 15–19 and 2) increase the overall use of seat belts from 82.1% to 90%
- Teen motor vehicle safety was named one of Colorado's 2010–2015 Maternal and Child Health Priorities

What We Learned

The partnership between the state health and transportation departments has been crucial to Colorado's success in reducing teen motor vehicle fatalities. Prior to the CTDA's formation, each agency addressed teen motor vehicle safety independently. Each brought unique skills and resources to the partnership: the health department had data and evaluation resources, as well as experience addressing motor vehicle safety from a population-based approach, while the transportation department had funding for media campaigns and a local grant-making program. Joining together to create one state action plan for teen motor vehicle safety decreased duplication and pooled resources allocated to educating teens, parents, and law enforcement.

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