

Traffic Safety Facts

2004 Data

Young Drivers

There were 196.2 million licensed drivers in the United States in 2003 (2004 data not available). Young drivers, between the ages of 15 and 20, accounted for 6.3 percent (12.4 million) of the total, a 7.2 percent increase from the 11.6 million young drivers in 1993.

In 2004, 7,898 15- to 20-year-old drivers were involved in fatal crashes — a 1-percent decrease from 7,968 involved in 1994. Driver fatalities for this age group increased by 5 percent between 1994 and 2004. For young males, driver fatalities rose by 1 percent, compared with a 15-percent increase for young females (Table 1).

“Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds.”

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds (based on 2002 figures, which are the latest mortality data currently available from the National Center for Health Statistics). In 2004, 3,620 drivers age 15 to 20 were killed, and an additional 303,000 injured, in motor vehicle crashes.

Figure 1

Driver Fatalities and Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Among Drivers Age 15 to 20, 1994-2004

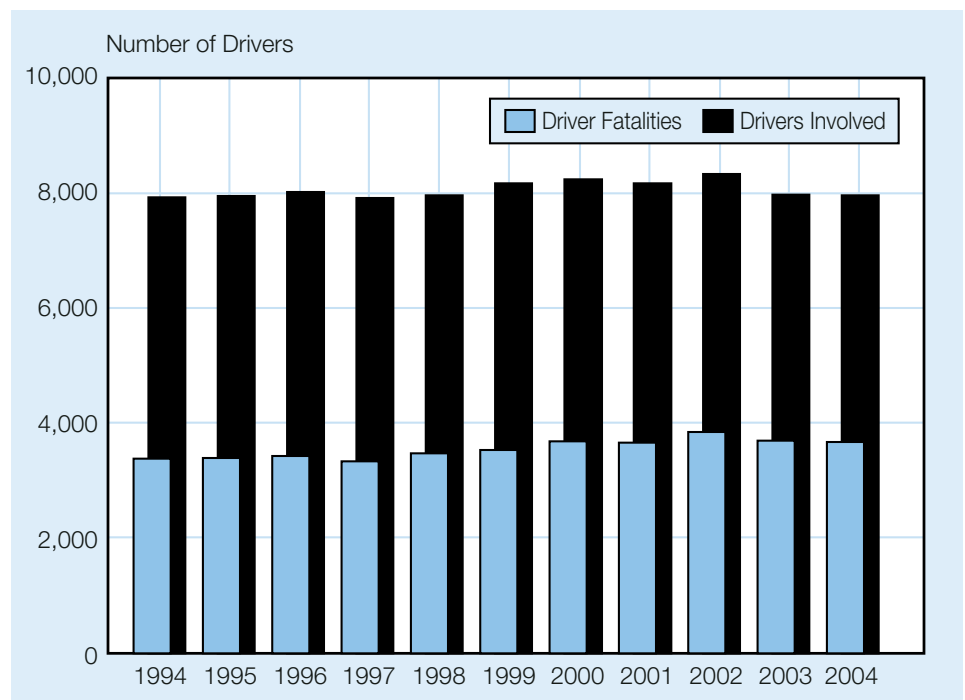


Table 1
Involvement of Drivers Age 15 to 20 in Fatal Crashes, 1994 and 2004

	1994			2004			Percentage Change, 1994-2004		
	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total	Total	Age 15-20	Percentage of Total
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes									
Total	54,549	7,968	14.6	58,080	7,898	13.6	6	-1	-6.9
Male	40,233	5,810	14.4	42,045	5,540	13.2	5	-5	-8.8
Female	13,567	2,156	15.9	15,268	2,358	15.4	13	9	-2.8
Driver Fatalities									
Total	23,691	3,449	14.6	26,756	3,620	13.5	13	5	-7.1
Male	17,548	2,557	14.6	20,015	2,593	13.0	14	1	-11.1
Female	6,142	892	14.5	6,739	1,027	15.2	10	15	4.9

“In 2004, 13.6 percent of all drivers involved in fatal crashes were between the ages of 15 and 20.”

In 2004, 13.6 percent (7,898) of all drivers involved in fatal crashes (58,080) were young drivers age 15 to 20, and 18 percent (1,986,000) of all drivers involved in police-reported crashes (10,933,000) were young drivers.

Table 2
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes and Driver Involvement Rates by Age Group, 2004

	Age Group (Years)							
	15-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-69	70+
2004 Population (Percent)	8.4	5.8	13.6	15.0	14.2	9.9	3.4	9.0
Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes (Percent)								
- Single-Vehicle	17.4	13.9	20.2	17.6	14.1	8.4	2.4	5.6
- Multi-Vehicle	11.7	9.6	19.2	19.3	17.0	10.5	3.2	9.2
- All Fatal Crashes	13.8	11.2	19.6	18.7	15.9	9.7	2.9	7.9
2003 Licensed Drivers (Percent)	6.3	6.9	18.3	20.9	19.5	13.4	4.5	10.1
2003 Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes per 100,000 Licensed Drivers*	63.8	46.3	31.4	27.0	23.6	20.7	18.2	24.4

* 2004 licensed driver data not available.

Note: Excluding unknown ages.

Among 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2004, 27 percent (342) of those who did not have a valid operator's license at the time of the crash also had a previous license suspension or revocation (Table 3). For the same year and age group, 29 percent of the drivers who were killed in motor vehicle crashes had been drinking (Table 4).

Table 3
Drivers 15 to 20 Years Old Involved in Fatal Crashes by Previous Driving Record and License Status, 2004

Driving Record	License Status				Total (7,898) *	
	Valid (6,548)		Invalid (1,255)		Number	Percent
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
Previous Recorded Crashes	1,023	15.6	148	11.8	1,171	14.8
Previous Recorded Suspensions or Revocations	509	7.8	342	27.3	851	10.8
Previous DWI Convictions	59	0.9	62	4.9	121	1.5
Previous Speeding Convictions	1,494	22.8	179	14.3	1,674	21.2
Previous Other Harmful or Moving Conviction	1,197	18.3	245	19.5	1,442	18.3

*Includes 95 drivers with unknown license status

Note: Excluding all drivers with unknown previous records

“During 2004, 300 motorcycle operators age 15 to 20 were killed and an additional 8,000 were injured.”

Motorcycles

During 2004, 300 young motorcycle operators (15 to 20 years old) were killed, and an additional 8,000 were injured.

Helmets are estimated to be 37 percent effective in preventing fatalities among motorcyclists. NHTSA estimates that helmets saved the lives of 1,316 motorcyclists of all ages in 2004, and that if all motorcyclists had worn helmets, an additional 670 lives could have been saved.

During 2004, 38 percent of motorcycle drivers between the ages of 15 and 20 who were fatally injured in crashes were not wearing helmets.

Of the young motorcycle drivers involved in fatal crashes in 2004, more than one-third (39%) were either unlicensed or driving with an invalid license.

Alcohol

A motor vehicle crash is considered to be *alcohol-related* if at least one driver or nonoccupant (such as a pedestrian or pedalcyclist) involved in the crash is determined to have had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .01 gram per deciliter (g/dL) or higher. Thus, any fatality that occurs in an alcohol-related crash is considered an alcohol-related fatality. The term “alcohol-related” does not indicate that a crash or fatality was caused by the presence of alcohol.

In 2004, 24 percent of young drivers age 15 to 20 who were killed in crashes had BAC levels of .08 g/dL or higher.

Table 4
Alcohol Involvement Among Drivers Age 15 to 20 Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2004

Driver Status	Percentage with BAC			
	Number of Drivers	.00 g/dL	.01 to .07 g/dL	.08 g/dL or Higher
1994				
Survived	4,519	83	5	12
Fatally Injured	3,449	68	7	25
Total	7,968	76	6	18
2004				
Survived	4,278	85	4	11
Fatally Injured	3,620	71	5	24
Total	7,898	78	5	17

“In 2004, 24 percent of the young drivers age 15 to 20 who were killed in crashes had a BAC levels of .08 g/dL or higher.”

Table 5
Intoxication Rates Among Young Drivers Fatally Injured in Traffic Crashes by Age, 2004

Age (Years)	Number of Drivers	Percentage with BAC .08 g/dL or Higher
15	97	17
16	431	13
17	616	17
18	854	24
19	818	29
20	804	34

The severity of a crash increases with alcohol involvement. In 2004, 5 percent of the 15- to 20-year-old drivers involved in property-damage-only crashes had been drinking, 5 percent of those involved in crashes resulting in injury had been drinking, and 22 percent of those involved in fatal crashes had been drinking.

The number of drivers age 15 to 20 involved in fatal crashes who had a BAC of .08 g/dL or higher dropped by 5 percent between 1994 and 2004.

For young drivers age 15 to 20, alcohol involvement is higher among males than females. In 2004, 26 percent of young male drivers involved in fatal crashes had been drinking at the time of the crash, compared with 12 percent of young female drivers involved in fatal crashes.

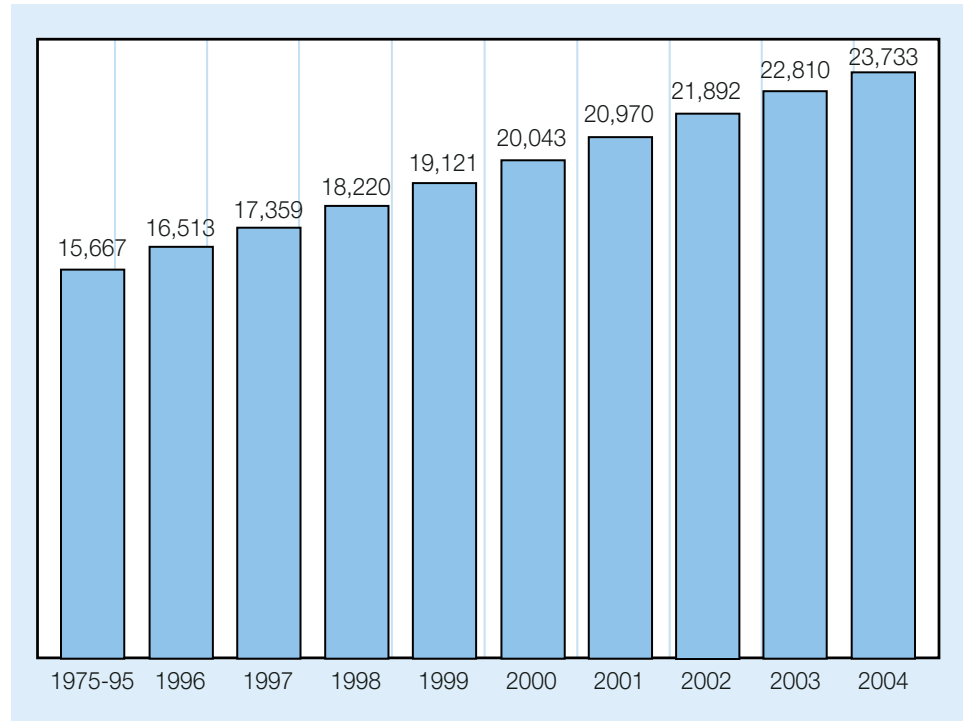
Drivers are less likely to use restraints when they have been drinking. In 2004, among young passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes, 63 percent of those who had been drinking were unrestrained. Of the young drivers who had been drinking and were killed in crashes, 74 percent were unrestrained.

All States and the District of Columbia now have minimum-drinking-age (21 years old) laws. NHTSA estimates that these laws have reduced traffic fatalities among 18- to 20-year-old drivers by 13 percent and have saved an estimated 23,733 lives since 1975. In 2004, an estimated 906 lives were saved by minimum-drinking-age laws.

“NHTSA estimates that minimum-drinking-age laws have saved 23,733 lives since 1975.”

Figure 2

Cumulative Estimated Number of Lives Saved by Minimum Drinking Age Laws, 1975-2004



For more information:

Information on young drivers is available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis, NPO-101, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590. NCSA information can also be obtained by telephone or by fax-on-demand at 800-934-8517. Fax messages should be sent to 202-366-7078. General information on highway traffic safety can be accessed by Internet users at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/nca. To report a safety-related problem or to inquire about motor vehicle safety information, contact the Vehicle Safety Hotline at 888-327-4236.

Other fact sheets available from the National Center for Statistics and Analysis are *Overview, Alcohol, Occupant Protection, Older Population, Speeding, Children, Pedestrians, Pedalcyclists, Large Trucks, Motorcycles, School Transportation-Related Crashes, State Traffic Data, and State Alcohol Estimates*. Detailed data on motor vehicle traffic crashes are published annually in *Traffic Safety Facts: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System*.