

# ★ ★ ★ ★ Teen Driver Safety

## Evaluation of Beginner Driver Education Programs: Studies in Manitoba and Oregon

### *The Situation*

- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teenagers.
- Beginner driver education (DE) has suffered a decline over the past few decades, with resources dwindling for programs, fewer states requiring it for soon-to-be-licensed novices, and many teens delaying licensure.
- Conventional wisdom holds that DE produces safer drivers, but little research supports this.
  - Unclear whether this is because DE doesn't "work," or because the evaluations themselves are flawed.

### *New Study (Available [Here](#))*

- Objectives:
  - Showcase more effective and constructive DE evaluation methods;
  - Generate new knowledge about the safety outcomes and effectiveness of traditional, in-class DE; and
  - Suggest ways to improve content and delivery of DE to maximize safety benefits.
- Methods:
  - Two study sites: Manitoba and Oregon
  - Manitoba studies involved:
    - Surveys to provide baseline data comparing teens who planned to take DE (DE) and those who didn't (non-DE);
    - Surveys of separate groups of DE and non-DE teen drivers to collect data on self-reported skills and knowledge;
    - Comparison of performance on a simulated drive test for DE and non-DE teens; and
    - Comparison of scores on driver license road test for DE and non-DE teens.
  - Oregon studies involved similar surveys to those in Manitoba, plus:
    - Longitudinal comparison of DE and non-DE teens' safety performance over the first few months of independent driving; and
    - Cross-sectional comparison of driving records of a large population of DE and non-DE teens.

Teens have the highest crash rate of any group in the United States.



## **Key Findings – Safety Effectiveness (Results from Oregon Only)**

- Large cross-sectional comparison of driving records of 94,342 DE and non-DE teens found:
  - 4.3% statistically-significant lower incidence of collisions for DE teens; and
  - 39.3% statistically-significant lower incidence of traffic convictions for DE teens.

## **Key Findings – Student Outcomes & Performance**

- In Manitoba:
  - DE associated with slightly greater safe driving knowledge, greater self-reported skills, fewer self-reported risk-taking behaviors, better performance on a simulated drive test, and stronger hazard anticipation.
  - DE teens still failed to identify many hazards.
- In Oregon:
  - DE associated with increases in knowledge about graduated driver licensing (GDL) and safe driving practices, greater self-reported skills, and more driving exposure.
  - Knowledge levels among DE teens still relatively low, however.
- In both Manitoba and Oregon, no significant difference in road test pass rates between DE and non-DE teens was observed; however, in Manitoba, DE group had better scores among those passing and failing the test.

## **Key Findings – Baseline Differences**

- In Manitoba, DE group was younger, more supportive of GDL, more accepting of risk, and less tolerant of deviant behavior as compared with non-DE.
- In Oregon, DE group was younger, more likely male, less likely Hispanic/Latino, more likely to reside in an urban setting, more supportive of GDL features, and reported less driving skills and driving at the outset.

## **Conclusions & Discussion**

- Overall, findings from Manitoba and Oregon suggest positive but modest effects of DE.
- Although some evidence points to increased safe driving knowledge of DE teens, the fact that this knowledge is still relatively low after DE suggests room for course and instructional improvements.
- Self-rated driving skills are significantly higher for DE teens, but more research is needed to determine whether this is a boon for safety, or a detriment (e.g., if it reflects confidence unmet by ability).
- Findings should help promote states' adoption of the NHTSA-funded Novice Teen Driver Education and Training Administrative Standards, developed and supported by a broad coalition of safety stakeholders. Designed to improve the scope, quality, consistency, and oversight of DE, the Standards promote, among other things, integration of DE into GDL, monitoring and evaluation of programs and providers, instructor certification, and a mandatory orientation session for parents covering key teen driving issues.

## **Useful Resources**

AAA and the AAA Foundation have developed several resources for families with teen drivers:

- [Driver-Zed](#) – Interactive risk-management training tool designed to help teens recognize how to react in a variety of driving scenarios.
- [StartSmart Online Parent Session](#) – Two-hour webinar that explains the licensing process and parents' role, and demonstrates how to reinforce what your teen is learning in DE and how to maximize the practice driving that you'll do with your teen.
- [TeenDriving.AAA.com](#) – AAA site that provides state-specific information to help parents and their teens navigate the learning-to-drive process, and includes links to the above programs.

For more information about the AAA Foundation's teen safety research, please visit [www.AAAFoundation.org](http://www.AAAFoundation.org).

