

Young driver safety

Young people are a precious part of our community. As Australia's future, they need to be encouraged, nurtured and protected

Young people are more mobile than at any time in the past. More young people own and / or drive motor vehicles than ever before. This has brought opportunities and increased freedom, but also risks.

There have been huge improvements in road safety over the past 25 years. The annual road toll in NSW has fallen from a high of 1384 in 1978 to 510 in 2004. The reduction in road deaths has occurred despite significant growth in population, vehicle numbers and kilometres travelled.

Initiatives such as random breath testing and compulsory seatbelts were break through reforms that resulted in dramatic reductions in road deaths and injuries. Other Government initiatives, safer vehicles, better roads and ongoing community education about road safety have also contributed to improvements.

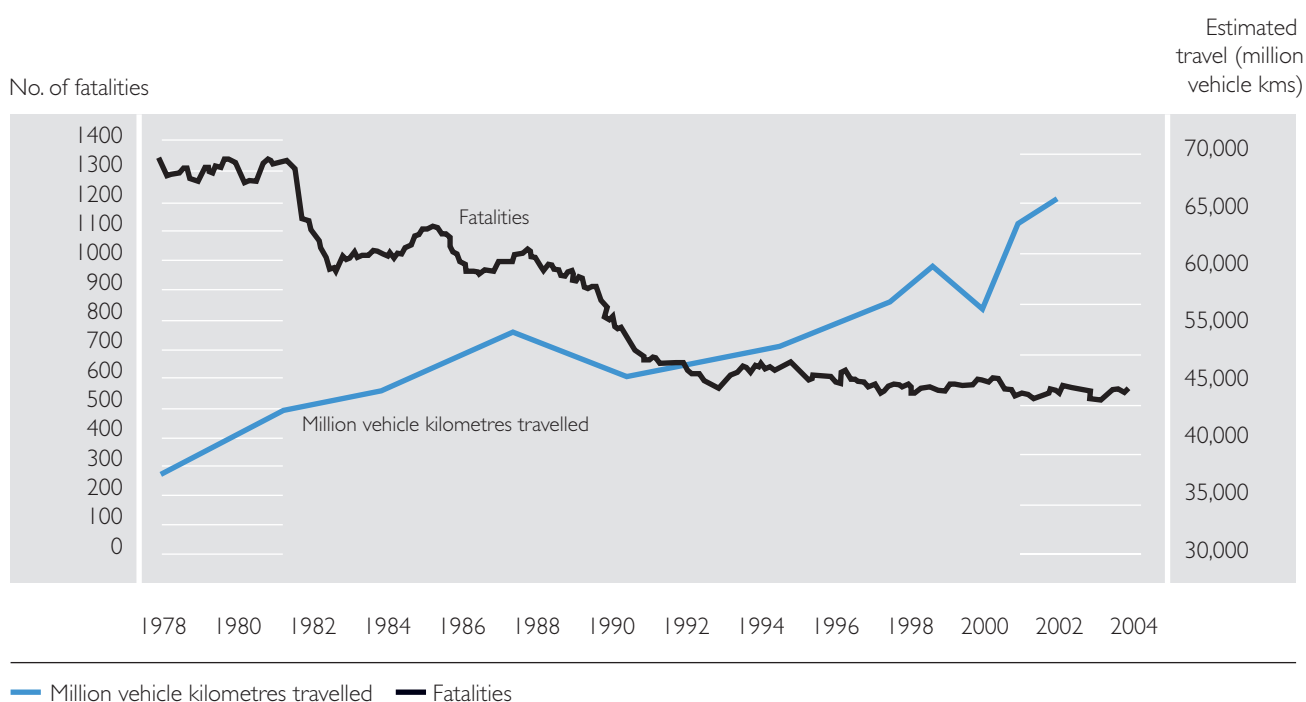
Young drivers have not been ignored in road safety measures. The Graduated Licensing Scheme was introduced in July 2000 specifically to improve training and licensing arrangements for new drivers.

In November 2004, the discussion paper *Improving Safety for Young Drivers* was released for community consultation. Recent initiatives for young drivers include the introduction of a ban on P plate licence holders driving high performance vehicles and a passenger restriction for P1 and P2 drivers who lose their licence due to disqualification for a serious driving offence.

Yet young people continue to be over-represented in road crash statistics.

There is general agreement among road safety and driver licensing authorities and the broader community, including young people themselves, that more needs to be done to reduce injuries and loss of life among young people on our roads.

FIGURE 01: Trends for fatalities and motor vehicle travel since 1978



Crashes involving young drivers

NSW crash statistics show that young people are over-represented as drivers and motorcycle riders in fatal crashes.

People under 26 comprise only 15% of driver licences but are involved in 36% of road fatalities.

During the five-year period 1999 to 2003, fatal crashes involving drivers* aged under 26 resulted in 1017 fatalities. There were 973 drivers and riders aged under 26 years involved in these crashes. Of these, 760 (78%) were identified as the controller of the vehicle primarily responsible for the crash. In contrast, only 60% of drivers aged over 25 years involved in fatal crashes over the same period were identified as the key vehicle controller.

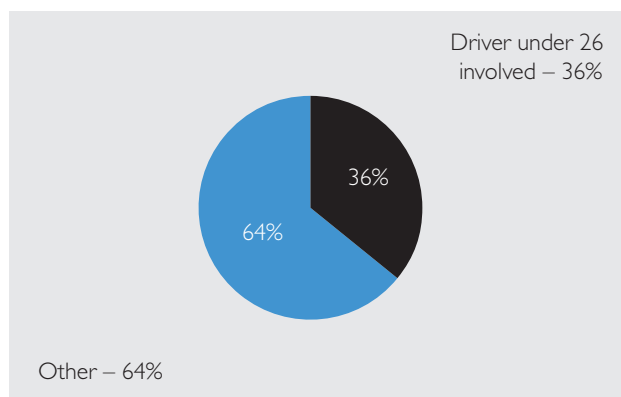
A 17-year-old driver with a P1 licence is about four times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than a driver aged 26 or older.

Drivers and motorcycle riders in fatal crashes

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Under 17	4	7	7	2	6
17-20	105	109	95	88	85
21-25	98	113	85	73	96
Total	207	229	187	163	187

As the above table shows, there has been a downward trend in the involvement of 17-20 year old drivers in fatal crashes over recent years. However, they remain over-represented.

FIGURE 02: Fatalities 1999 – 2003



Within the over-representation of young people in crashes, males stand out as a concern. Males make up 79% of the drivers under 26 involved in fatal crashes.

Crashes and passengers

Young drivers have a greater risk of involvement in a fatal crash if they have two or more passengers.

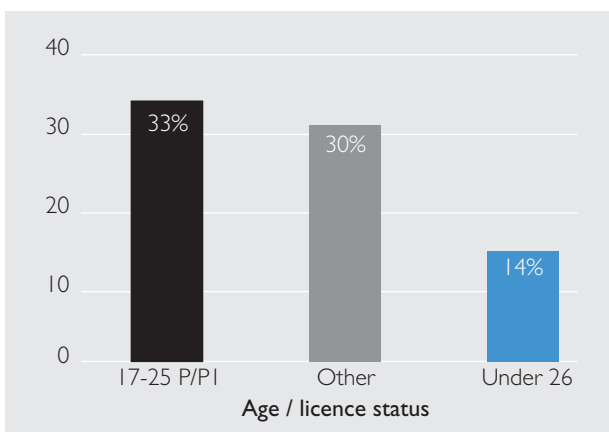
Of the 89 young drivers involved in fatal crashes from 2001 to 2003, 36 per cent were driving with two or more passengers. This contrasts with 15 per cent for drivers aged 26 and over.

Time of crash

Numerous international and national studies, along with an analysis of NSW crash data, have confirmed the increased risk for young drivers at night.

The involvement of young drivers in late night and early morning fatal crashes is significantly higher than that of older drivers as outlined in figure 3. Of the 96 P plate drivers aged under 26 who were involved in fatal crashes from 2001 to 2003, 33% crashed between 10pm and 5am. This compared with 14% of drivers aged 26 years and over.

FIGURE 03: Drivers in fatal crashes between 10pm and 5am as a percentage of total for each group 2001-2003.



Young drivers with a P licence are six times more likely to be involved in a fatal crash between 10pm and 5am than other drivers.**

The over-involvement of young drivers is highest on Friday and Saturday nights. However, young drivers are also over-represented on other nights of the week.

* In this document, the term drivers generally includes motorcycle riders

** Calculated on a per licence holder basis.