

# Study: Night Driving Greatest Risk for Fatal Teen Car Accidents

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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For teens, nighttime driving is more likely to result in death than drinking, speeding or failure to wear a seatbelt, according to a 10-year nationwide study by the Texas Transportation Institute. The study, which used national data on traffic fatalities from 1999 to 2008, concluded that night driving is the single most dangerous risk teen drivers can take.

In the 1999 to 2008 period overall, traffic fatalities declined. The decline was attributed to seatbelt laws, better drunk driving enforcement, vehicle safety and improvements in road safety. Those factors apply both day and night, so researchers dug further to determine why they didn't result in an equal reduction in nighttime traffic deaths among teens.

Alcohol was a clear factor in the nighttime deaths drivers 20 and older, but the same could not be said for the fatalities among teens. While the data showed that there was an even greater increase in alcohol use among teens over the period than for those 20 and over, there was no corresponding increase in alcohol-related fatal [car accidents](#) among teenagers.

## **Adding Cell Phone Use to Night Driving Compounds the Risk**

A false sense of safety about texting and cell phone use while driving is likely contributing to the increase. Especially at night, teens may overestimate their ability to pay attention to their driving while using these devices.

"A quarter of all teens admit to texting behind the wheel," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in an interview with the Washington Post. LaHood has worked for more than a year amassing data and advocating against texting and cell phone use by drivers.

"Teen drivers are some of the most vulnerable drivers on the road due to inexperience, and adding cell phones to the mix only compounds the dangers. We're doing everything possible to get the message out to teens that driving while talking or texting on a cell phone is not worth the risk."

Bernie Fette, one of the study's authors, argues that teens often dismiss those dangers, and few are aware that darkness, fatigue and inexperience combine with distracted driving to magnify the risk of a car accident. "Whenever you combine the nighttime danger and the cell phone danger with inexperience, you have created a perfect storm."

Related Resource:

["Nighttime driving is biggest danger for teen drivers, study says"](#) (Washington Post, May 6, 2010)