



Mott Poll Report

September 16, 2019
Volume 34
Issue 6

Teens Riding with Teens: Safety Concerns

Teens are often passengers in cars driven by other teens to school, activities and social events. It is important not to overlook the common safety issues for teens who are passengers when other teens are driving. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of teens 14-18 years old about the experiences of their teens as passengers in cars driven by fellow teens and the strategies they have discussed to handle unsafe drivers.

Teens riding with other teens is common; one in three parents (34%) say their teens are passengers with teen drivers at least once or twice a week. However, many parents report trying to limit their teen being a passenger with another teen driver. Over half of parents make an effort to limit them riding in bad weather (68%), after midnight (67%) or if the driver has had a license for <6 months (53%). Parents also try to limit their teen riding with more than two other teens in the car (48%), after dark (45%) and on the highway (41%).

Nearly 3 in 5 parents (59%) believe their teen has been a passenger in an unsafe situation with a teen driver. These experiences include a teen driver distracted either by loud music (46%), their cell phone (42%) or other teens in the car (39%). Some parents note unsafe conditions where their teen has ridden with a teen driver who was speeding (45%), too tired to drive safely (14%) or impaired by alcohol or drugs (5%).

Most parents say they have talked with their teen about how to handle a situation in which they felt unsafe when riding in a car with another teen. Parent advice on how to handle situations with an unsafe driver include: not riding again with the unsafe driver (66%), telling the driver they are uncomfortable with the unsafe driving (63%), asking the driver to stop the car and getting out (48%) and offering to manage the radio or phone if it was distracting the driver (47%).

Many parents (80%) have talked with their teen about what to do if the driver appears impaired from alcohol or drugs; 88% of parents want their teen to call them for a ride, 80% say they should just not get into the car, 51% suggest finding another person with whom to ride and 39% want their teen to take the car keys from the impaired driver.

Parent advice to teens if riding with a distracted teen driver

Not ride again with unsafe driver	66%
Tell driver they are uncomfortable	63%
Ask driver to stop the car	48%
Offer to manage radio/phone	47%
Offer to drive	28%

Report Highlights

1 in 3 parents say their teen rides at least once a week with another teen driving.

3 in 5 parents report their teen has been a passenger in a car driven by a teen distracted by loud music, cell phones, or other teens.

Parents say they limit their teen riding with a teen driver in bad weather (68%), after midnight (67%), and/or if the driver has had a license for less than 6 months (53%).

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in February 2019 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 0-18 years living in their household (n=2,032). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 877 parents who had at least one child 14-18 years. The margin of error for results presented in this report is ±2 to 5 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the University of Michigan Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.

C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Co-Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH

Co-Director: Gary L. Freed, MD, MPH

Poll Manager: Dianne C. Singer, MPH

Data Analyst: Acham Gebremariam, MS

Publication Designer: Sara L. Schultz, MPS



**SUSAN B. MEISTER
CHILD HEALTH EVALUATION
AND RESEARCH CENTER**
MICHIGAN MEDICINE

Implications

Much attention rightfully is placed on improving the safety of teen drivers, but the passengers who ride with those teen drivers deserve consideration. This Mott Poll suggests that parents should play an active role in preparing their teen for an uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situation when they are a passenger with another teen at the wheel.

Parents in this poll noted that they limit their teen's risk by not allowing them to ride with another teen driver in certain situations, like bad weather, riding after midnight or with more than two teens in the car. Many parents do not want their teen to ride with a driver who has less than 6 months of independent driving experience. These limitations indicate that parents recognize the risks of teen drivers who have minimal experience on the road. Lack of experience can result in delayed reactions to changes in road or driving conditions, or failure to identify potential hazards from other cars or pedestrians. When teens are allowed to ride with teen drivers, parents should encourage their teen be proactive to lower the risk of an accident by avoiding common situations that cause distractions to the driver. For example, teen passengers can offer to hold the driver's cell phones, so that GPS directions can be heard without the distraction of texts or calls. Teen passengers can also manage the radio, keeping the volume in check so the driver can hear the siren of emergency vehicles or other relevant sounds that may require an adjustment in driving.

Parents can also help teens develop strategies for what to do when they are passengers in a car with someone who is not driving safely. Parents should work to empower their teen to know it is their right to ask the driver to slow down if speeding, not look at their phone and to stop any other unsafe activity. If the driver does not listen and the teen passenger still feels unsafe, they should ask the driver to pull over and get out of the car.

A situation that is less common, but potentially deadly, occurs when the teen feels their driver may be impaired by drugs or alcohol. Parents can make formal agreements with their teen that allow them to call for a ride anytime they feel unsafe, whenever that may be. This sends a clear message to teens that safety is the foremost concern, and that fear of punishment should not deter the teen from calling parents for help. Other options are for the teen to get a ride from another friend or use a ride-share service. Ideally, the risks from an impaired teen driver can be avoided if someone notices the teen is impaired and takes the keys away before he or she gets into the vehicle.

Car crashes are the leading cause of death and injury for teens. More than half of teens who die in car crashes are passengers, and the chances of being in a fatal accident are much higher when there is a teen driver. Safe driving should be a shared responsibility for both teen drivers and passengers as the risks are high for each. Parents have an important role to play in helping their teen become safety-minded passengers.