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Study: Laws restricting teen drivers can cut deaths

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WASHINGTON - Laws that set numerous strict conditions before teenagers can get a license can reduce fatal crashes involving 16-year-old drivers by about one-fifth, public health researchers say.

Examples include a waiting period before a young driver is eligible to move from a learner's permit to an intermediate license, restrictions on driving at night, required hours of supervision by an adult driver, and limits on the number of passengers a teenage driver can have.

States with such restrictions as part of strong graduated driver's licensing programs showed declines in fatal crashes involving 16-year-olds, according to a study being released today by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore.

"We already knew that the programs reduced crash rates of young drivers, but we didn't know which programs were most effective in reducing risk," said Susan P. Baker, a professor at the school.

Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death for teenagers. Federal figures show that 16-year-old drivers were involved in 957 fatal crashes that killed 1,111 people in 2004.

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