

IT'S THE LAW...



In Virginia, you may get your learner's permit when you reach **15 years and 6 months of age**. It allows you to operate a motor vehicle when a licensed driver at least 21 years of age is seated beside you.

The driver accompanying you may be 18 years of age if he or she is your legal guardian, brother, sister, half-brother, half-sister, stepbrother or stepsister. The driver accompanying you must hold a valid driver's license, be alert and able to assist you and be legally permitted to drive.

If you are **under age 18**, you must hold a Virginia learner's permit for at least 9 months, in addition to providing proof of successful completion of a state-approved driver education program. The **minimum age** for obtaining a Virginia driver's license is **16 years and 3 months**. All first-time driver's licenses issued to persons under age 18 are sent to the judge of your local juvenile and domestic relations court. The court will notify you by mail about when and where you and your parent, custodial parent or legal guardian must appear to receive your license. DMV can deny or suspend driving privileges for persons under age 18 if the juvenile: is found delinquent by a court; is in need of supervision; is involved in an alcohol or drug-related offense; or needs court-assigned services or programs such as counseling.

For more information and application requirements, visit the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles website at: www.dmv.state.va.us.

CURFEW, CELL PHONE USE & OTHER RESTRICTIONS

Suffolk's curfew laws prohibit drivers **under age 18** who hold a learner's permit or driver's license from driving midnight to 4 a.m. If you hold a driver's license you may drive during these hours: in case of an emergency; when traveling to and from work; to or from an activity supervised by an adult that is sponsored by a school, civic religious or public organization; when accompanied by a parent or other adult acting in place of a parent; when responding to an emergency call as a volunteer firefighter or rescue squad personnel.

If you are under age 18, you may carry only 1 passenger under age 21 during the first year that you hold your driver's license. After you have held your license for 1 year, you may carry up to 3 passengers

under age 21 until you reach age 18, if it is travel to and from school sponsored activity; a licensed driver 21 or older is in the front seat; or in case of an emergency. Learner's permit holders may not carry more than 1 passenger under age 18. Passenger restrictions do not apply to family members. Violations of either the curfew or passenger restrictions can result in the suspension of your driver's license.

Virginia drivers younger than 18 **may not** operate a motor vehicle while using a cell phone or other wireless communications devices, even if they are considered to be hands-free, except in a driver emergency and when the vehicle is lawfully parked or stopped. The law also prohibits text-messaging while driving.



Virginia drivers under age 21 who are convicted of "zero tolerance" drinking and driving – driving after consuming virtually any level of alcohol – face tougher punishment. If convicted, offenders lose their driver's licenses for a **year** and pay a minimum \$500 fine or do 50 hours of community service.

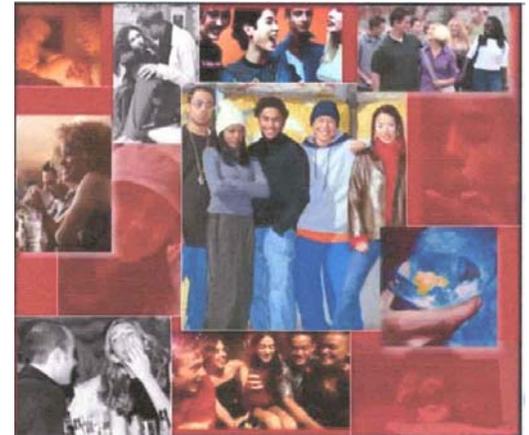
GENERAL TIPS

- Always wear your seatbelt – and make sure all passengers buckle up, too.
- Obey the speed limits. Going too fast gives you less time to stop or react. Excess speed is one of the main causes of teenage accidents.
- Don't blast the radio. You might miss hearing a siren or horn that could warn you of possible trouble.
- Make sure your car has gas in it. Don't ride around with the gauge on empty – who knows where you might get stranded.
- Don't drink and drive, and don't ride with anyone who has been drinking. Call parents or friends to take you home if you need a ride.
- Don't talk on a cell phone (it's the law!), put on make-up, fiddle with the radio or CD player, comb your hair or eat while driving. People who talk on car phones while driving are 4 times more likely to have an accident.



C. Phillips "Phil" Ferguson
Commonwealth's Attorney
150 North Main Street
Suffolk, VA 23434
Phone (757) 514-4365
www.suffolk.va.us/cwatty

How to Survive the Teenage Driving Years



An Information Guide for Teens and Parents

provided by

C. Phillips "Phil" Ferguson
Commonwealth's Attorney

THE TEEN DRIVER



A driver's license is one of the biggest status symbols among high school students. Getting a driver's license is not only a social asset but it makes the adolescent feel more independent than ever before. Parents no longer have to do the driving – the teen can get places on his or her own. With this independence, however, comes a tragic reality. Auto crashes are the leading cause of death for teens and young adults.

STATISTICS YOU SHOULD KNOW...

- Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death for teens and young adults, including homicide, cancer and suicide.
- Drivers who are 16 years old are more than 20 times as likely to have a crash as are other drivers.
- Approximately 20% of teen vehicle fatalities involve alcohol.
- Most teen driver deaths due to motor vehicle accidents occur on weekends 54% of the time.
- Of teen drivers fatally injured in automobiles, more than 1/3 were speed related accidents.
- Teen lifestyles of staying up late make teen drivers a high risk to have an automobile accident due to drowsiness.
- 10 – 20% of all fatal or injury crashes involve drowsy driving.
- Dialing a phone number increases a fatal crash by six times.
- Texting while driving increases a crash by 23 times.
- More than any age group, teens are likely to be involved in a single vehicle crash.
- Adolescents are much more likely to drive safely when their parents restrict their driving and monitor their whereabouts.

YOUNG DRIVERS AT RISK



There are two main reasons teens are at a higher risk for being in a car crash – lack of driving experience and their tendency to take risks while driving.

Teens drive faster and do not control the car as well as more experienced drivers. Their judgment in traffic is often insufficient to avoid a crash. In addition, teens do most of their driving at night, which can be even more difficult. Per mile driving, the nighttime fatal crash rate for 16 year-olds is about twice as high as during the day.

Teen drivers are more likely to be influenced by peers and other stresses and distractions. This can lead to reckless driving behaviors such as speeding, driving while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and not wearing safety belts. Teen fatal crashes are more likely to occur when other teenagers are in the car. Teens are 2.5 more likely to engage in risky behavior with another teen in the car. The risk increases with every additional passenger.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

Establish and discuss “house rules” about driving even before your teen gets a license. Remind your teen that these rules are in place because you care about his or her safety. If your teen complains about the rules, stand firm. Remember, **you** control the car keys. Don't hesitate to take away driving privileges if your teen breaks any rules. Resist the urge to break the house rules yourself and let your teen drive because it is too much trouble for you to drive. Instead, try to arrange a car pool of parents and take turns driving. By slowly increasing driving privileges, you can help your teen get the experience needed to drive safely and responsibly.

Restrict night driving. Most nighttime fatal crashes among young drivers occur between 9 pm and midnight. The problem isn't just that late-night driving requires more skill. Outings late at night tend to be recreational. In these circumstances, even teens that usually follow all the rules can be easily distracted or encouraged to take risks.

Restrict passengers. Teen passengers in a vehicle can distract a beginning driver and/or lead to greater risk-taking. While night driving with passengers is particularly lethal, many fatal crashes with teen passengers occur during the day. The best policy is to restrict teen passengers, especially multiple teens, all the time.

Supervise practice driving. Take an active role in helping your teenager learn how to drive. Plan a series of practice sessions in a wide variety of situations, including night driving. Give beginners time to work up to challenges like driving in heavy traffic or on the interstate.

Require safety belt use. Remember, you are a role model. *Always buckle up.* Don't assume that seatbelt use when you're in the car with your teen means seatbelts will be used all the time. Remember that seatbelt use is lower among teenagers than older people. 58% of passenger fatalities of teens occurred when not wearing a seatbelt. *Insist on seatbelt use all the time... it's the law!*



Choose vehicles for safety, not image. Teenagers should drive vehicles that reduce their chances of a crash and offer protection in case they do crash. Generally, large cars are safer than small ones and airbags enhance safety.