



Teen Driver Licensing in North Carolina

Improving Teen Driver Safety for a Quarter Century

A Life-Saving Teen Driver Safety Program Started in NC. North Carolina's young driver licensing system, commonly known as Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL), was enacted in 1997 with overwhelming support of the general public and legislators in both the House and Senate. North Carolina led the nation in embracing this modern approach to reducing deaths and injuries in motor vehicle crashes. As a result, 16-year-old driver crashes in North Carolina soon declined by 38%; fatal/serious injury crashes declined by 46%. In large part because of this great success in NC, all but two U.S. states have now adopted similar tiered licensing systems.

Why It Works. Inexperience is the primary cause of teen driver crashes. GDL addresses this problem by: 1) ensuring new drivers develop a deep understanding of driving, while 2) minimizing their crash risk as they learn. To gain experience safely, young drivers begin with a 9-month learner period (until legislative changes in 2021, this was 12 months). This extensive practice period enables teens to safely become familiar with a variety of driving situations, a range of road types, and in all sorts of weather by having an experienced adult driver with them. They then graduate to driving mostly on their own. But because driving with multiple young passengers, or at night, is particularly dangerous for new teen drivers, an adult co-driver is needed for another 6 months when driving in these conditions.

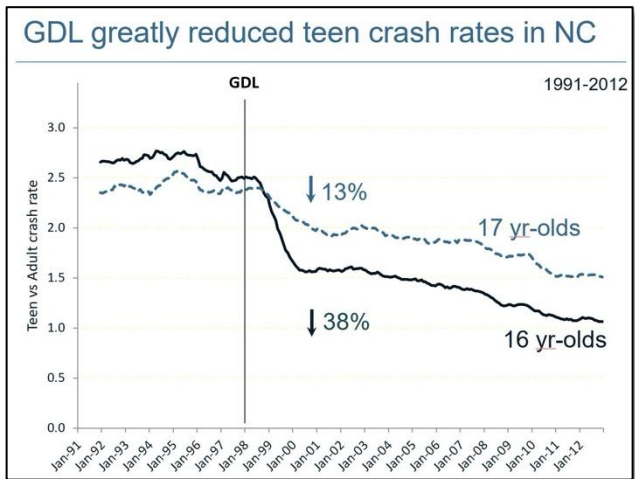
12 Months of Practice is the "Gold Standard." The graduated approach to licensing has reduced teen crashes in every state, but few have seen the extensive benefits found in NC. This is largely due to the 12-month learner period NC required until 2021.

The table shows research findings on effects of learner period length.

Longer learner periods mean safer roads

State-specific change in 16-17-yr-old driver fatal crashes

Learner period duration (months)	State-specific rate decline	Average decline by learner duration
12 Months		- 30%
North Carolina	- 30%	
6 Months		- 12%
Minnesota	- 19%	
Connecticut	- 17%	
Kentucky	- 9%	
Virginia	- 6%	
3 Months		- 4%
Hawaii	- 11%	
South Carolina	- 3%	
Tennessee	- 0.8%	



Parents appreciate GDL. Since its beginning, parents of teens have overwhelmingly approved of all the key elements of this system. They see it as the state helping them protect their teens' safety. In a recent survey, **97% of parents of newly licensed drivers in North Carolina said they approved of the 12-month duration of the learner period they had recently been through with their teen.** They clearly saw the benefits.