

Novice Drivers



Novice drivers face a very high crash risk, particularly during the first 12 months of driving on a provisional licence. The major factor in crashes involving novice drivers is the lack of driving experience. Driver training programs produce little, if any improvement in reducing crashes involving novice drivers whereas supervised driving experience has shown to reduce crash risk among novice drivers.

The current problem

An average of 50 young people aged 17-24 years are killed on Western Australian roads every year. This makes them twice as likely to be killed compared to other licence holders.¹ In WA, 20 per cent of drivers killed in road crashes are under 20 years of age, but this age group represents only six per cent of all drivers.²

Novice drivers in their first 12 months of solo driving face a very high crash risk with the greatest crash risk being in the first six months of unsupervised driving.³ Research shows that in their first year of holding a licence, drivers aged 17-18 have a crash rate up to five times higher than drivers over 19.⁴

Why are young drivers at risk on our roads?

Lack of driving experience is a major factor in crashes involving young people.² Evidence shows that youth and driver inexperience can be a fatal combination.⁴

Driving is a complex task and inexperienced young drivers often find it hard to concentrate on the multiple tasks required when driving.⁴ Simple driving skills such as learning the road rules or changing gears may take only a short time to master but highly complex skills (including seeing and responding to hazards) take much longer to fully develop.⁴



Driver training vs. supervised driving

Driver training includes both pre-licence and post-licence training that may impart basic car control skills, road law skills, defensive and advanced skills to avoid and cope with critical situations. Supervised driving occurs when a novice driver is under the supervision of an experienced driver or instructor. Supervised driving experience helps novice drivers to detect hazards, understand the environment and conditions, and helps them to recognise dangerous situations and respond appropriately.

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Why not provide novice drivers with more training?

Repeated reviews of traditional driver training programs have shown few benefits in terms of crash and injury reductions.⁴ In fact, in some cases such training that attempts to convey advanced skills such as skid control have been counterproductive, resulting in more crashes.^{3,4} The reason is that some novice drivers who are taught advanced driving skills become overconfident and take more risks, including driving at higher speeds.⁴ Improving knowledge and skill through driver training does not always lead to a change in behaviour among drivers.³

Supervised driving experience reduces crashes

Increasing the amount of supervised on-road driving experience of novice drivers is vital to reducing their risk of being involved in a crash.

Greater levels of supervised experience during the learner period have shown to result in reduced post licence crash involvement by more than a third.³ Swedish research also shows that learners who received about 118 hours of supervised experience had up to 35% fewer crashes than those who received only 41-47 hours.³

All six Australian States have introduced compulsory minimum number of supervised driving hours for learners before they can apply for the provisional licence.⁵ WA requires learners to obtain 50 hours of supervised driving, with New South Wales (120), Victoria (120) and Queensland (100) having implemented supervised driving requirements of 120 and 100 hours.

Why is supervised driving experience important?

To develop essential traffic skills requires significant amounts of driving experience. These skills include being able to observe and make sense of the road and traffic environment, to anticipate emerging hazards and recognise danger, and to make accurate assessments and decisions quickly to avoid hazards. In summary, there is no shortcut to experience.

Tips for novice drivers

- Gain as much supervised driving experience as you can before you get your full licence.
- While under supervision drive in a range of different conditions including varying weather, time of the day and night, traffic volumes, road types and speeds.
- Limit the number of peer passengers you carry in your car.
- Limit night driving as much as possible.
- Switch off mobile phone to avoid being distracted.
- Do not drink alcohol before driving.

Note: In WA, there are additional conditions for provisional licence holders which include night time driving restrictions, zero blood alcohol concentration and reduced demerit point limits. For more information visit www.transport.wa.gov.au.

References:

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