

Risky driving puts P-platers at high danger of crash

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Australia's largest study of young drivers has shown that risky driving habits are putting young drivers at a significantly increased risk of crashing, irrespective of their perceptions about road safety. The study surveyed 20,000 young drivers and examined their crashes reported to police. Young drivers involved in the study who said they undertook risky driving were 50% more likely to crash.

Previous research has confirmed risky, dangerous driving behaviour is more prevalent among younger drivers than older drivers. Researchers at The George Institute investigated the relationship between risky driving behaviour, risk perception and the risk of crash. They report that young drivers who had a poor risk perception or an inability to recognise driving risks were more likely to crash. However, those who did have a good understanding, but undertook risky driving behaviour when they were behind the wheel, still had a much greater likelihood of crashing.

"Our study shows that if young drivers engage in a range of risky driving behaviours, regardless of their perceptions, their crash risk escalates significantly. Risky driving behaviours included speeding, carrying multiple passengers, listening to loud music and text messaging while driving. The research evidence shows that these behaviours are significant contributors to road crashes, particularly among young drivers who are still building their road skills in the first year of driving", said report author, Associate Professor Rebecca Ivers at The George Institute.

"The key finding in our study was that we discovered the main contributor to crashes is actual behaviours when young drivers are behind the wheel - not their perceptions or attitudes about safety", Associate Professor Ivers added.

Statistics show that young drivers are more likely to be injured or killed in car crashes than older drivers. Young drivers remain overrepresented in [road traffic](#) fatalities, showing that young driver safety is a significant public health issue.

"These results point to the fact that young driver policies should be focused on changing behaviour rather than targeting perceptions about safety. Education is important, but just focusing on increasing knowledge and improving attitudes is not enough. Legislation that deters risky driving, such as serious restrictions for new drivers, and enforcement of those restrictions will have far more impact", added Dr Teresa Senserrick, another investigator on the study.

According to researchers at The George Institute, recent changes to young driver legislation is a step in the right direction. This includes the introduction of stronger graduated licensing systems in various states. The findings of this report, published in the *American Journal of Public Health*, suggest that restrictions such as passenger and night time driving restrictions in addition to zero tolerance to speeding are warranted.

These results are part of a series of analyses from the DRIVE study, which is the largest survey of young drivers ever undertaken and was funded by Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council, NRMA Motoring and Services, and NRMA-ACT Road Safety trust and the Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW. The DRIVE study recruited over 20,822 young drivers holding red P-plates in NSW aged 17-24 years. The overall aim of the study is to investigate the risk factors in motor vehicle-related crashes and injuries among young drivers and to

find ways to improve the safety of young drivers and help make roads safer for all users.

This particular analysis investigated the relationship between risky driving behaviour, risk perception and risk of crash. Additional results due to be released during 2009/2010 includes rural and socioeconomic factors for young drivers, pre-licensing driving experience, training and education, mental health, and sleep habits.

Source: Research Australia ([news](#) : [web](#))

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