

Young Drivers and Road Safety in South Australia

Despite steady falls in South Australia’s road toll over the past decade, young drivers continue to be over-represented in road trauma statistics.

People aged 16 to 24 years make up 12% of the population, but account for 27% of road fatalities and 30% of serious injuries.

People aged 16 to 19 make up 5% of the population, but account for 11% of fatalities and 14% of serious injuries in South Australia each year. Also, young drivers have a significantly higher risk of death relative to the number of kilometres they drive, compared to other driver age groups. Nearly 90% of young driver fatalities aged 16 to 19 are male and nearly all are responsible for the fatal crash they are involved in.

Provisional (P1 and P2) licence drivers have the highest level of over-representation.

People aged 20 to 24 make up 7% of the population but account for 16% of fatalities and 16% of serious injuries in South Australia each year.

Research shows that the human brain’s final stages of development, particularly for males, continue well into a person’s early 20s, and often conclude around age 25. The prefrontal cortex, which governs reasoning, advanced thought and impulse control, is the final area of the human brain to mature, but is a critical element in safe driving.

Figure 1 illustrates that young drivers, particularly those aged 17 to 21 are involved in more road crashes than any other driver age group.

FIGURE 1: Number of drivers involved in casualty crashes, by age, per year in SA, 2004-2008

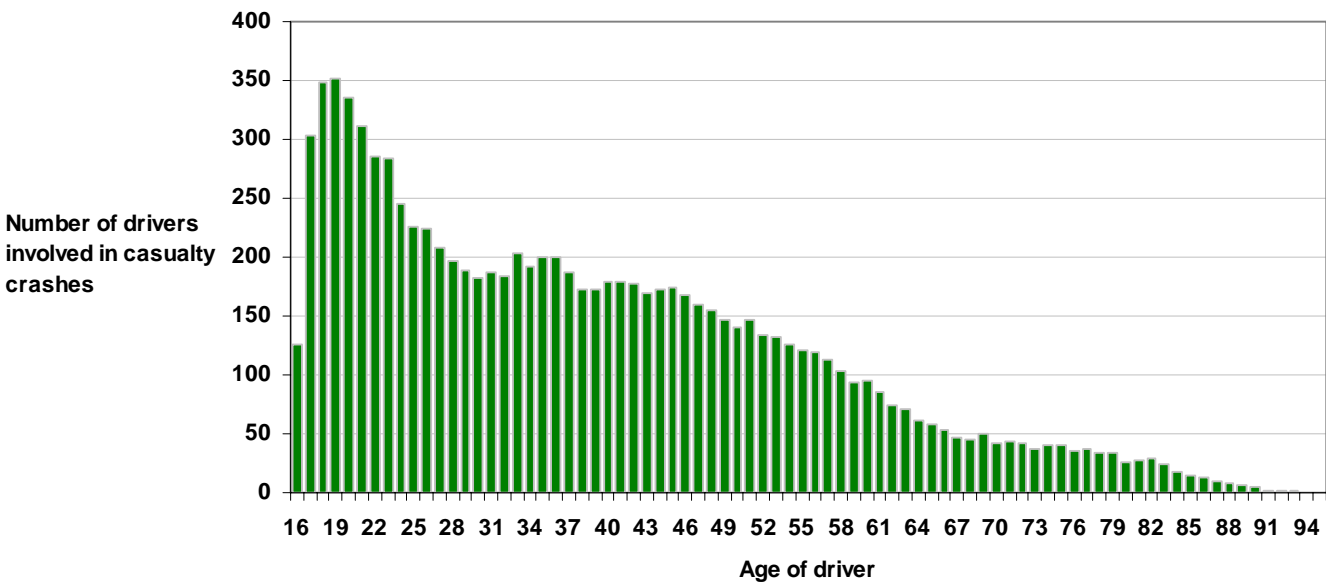
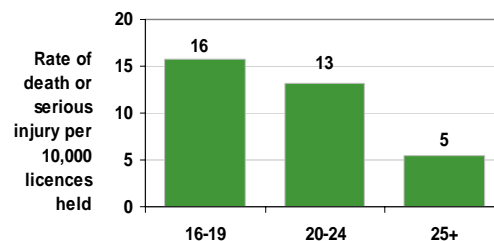


Figure 2 below illustrates that young drivers aged 16 to 19 have a rate of 16 deaths or serious injuries for every 10,000 drivers licensed. This is at least 3 times the rate of older drivers aged 25 and above who have a rate of 5 fatalities or serious injuries per 10,000 licences held.

Figure 2 also shows that drivers aged 20 to 24 years have a rate of 13 deaths or serious injuries for every 10,000 licences held, nearly 3 times the rate of drivers aged 25 years and above.

FIGURE 2: Rate of death or serious injury per 10,000 licences held for drivers by age, 2004-2008



Research has shown that younger drivers, particularly males, exhibit certain attributes that contribute to their higher risk of road crashes.

These include:

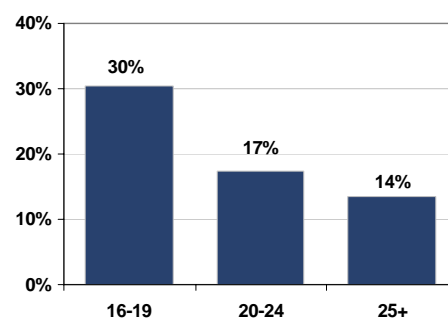
- A greater inclination for risk taking
- The use of older vehicles with fewer safety features
- A greater susceptibility to inappropriate peer pressure and other driver distractions such as mobile phone use
- Driving too fast for the road conditions
- Not allowing appropriate space between vehicles
- Running red lights.

In keeping with best practice internationally and interstate, South Australia manages these risks through a Graduated Licensing Scheme that supports drivers in gaining appropriate experience at an appropriate age.

Crashes and passengers

Research shows the risk of young drivers crashing increases when carrying two or more passengers in the vehicle. In South Australia, 30% of drivers aged 16 to 19 involved in fatal crashes from 2004 to 2008 were driving with two or more passengers – see Figure 3. By contrast, 17% of drivers aged 20 to 24 and 14% of drivers aged 25 and over involved in fatal crashes were carrying two or more passengers.

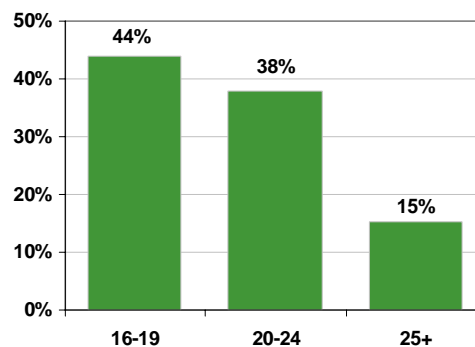
FIGURE 3: Drivers involved in fatal crashes with 2 or more passengers in the vehicle as a percentage of total crashes, 2004-2008



Time of crash

Numerous studies have shown an increased risk for young drivers late at night. The involvement of South Australian young drivers in late night and early morning fatal crashes is higher than for older drivers – see Figure 4. Of the younger drivers aged 16 to 19 involved in fatal crashes from 2004 to 2008, 44% had crashes between 10pm and 5am, compared to 38% of drivers aged 20 to 24 and 15% for drivers aged 25 years and over.

FIGURE 4: Drivers involved in fatal crashes between 10pm and 5am as a percentage of total crashes, 2004-2008



Definitions

Fatal Crash - A crash for which there is at least one fatality.

Fatality - A person who dies within 30 days of a crash as a result of injuries sustained in that crash.

Serious Injury Crash - A non-fatal crash in which at least one person is seriously injured.

Serious Injury - A person who sustains injuries and is admitted to hospital as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

Data sources

The data presented in this reports is obtained from the Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure Road Crash Database.

Figure relating to the current year are provisional and are subject to revision.

Enquiries

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