

Hope lives here.



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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### NEW RESEARCH SHOWS CAR CRASH DEATHS INCREASE STARTING AT AGE 12

*Researchers share key tips to protect children from unsafe driving situations.*

**Philadelphia, PA, March 3, 2008** — Child passengers ages 12 to 17 are more likely to die in a car crash than younger children, according to a study released today in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*. This risk increases with each teenage year. Conducted as part of on-going research collaboration between The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) and State Farm Insurance Companies®, the study offers evidence-based guidelines for parents and policymakers to help protect this vulnerable age group.

Researchers examined 45,560 crashes involving 8- to 17-year-old passengers. Between 2000 and 2005, 9,807 passengers in this age group died in crashes.

“We saw a clear tipping point that occurred between ages 12 and 14, where child passengers became much more likely to die in a crash than their younger counterparts,” says Flora Koplin-Winston, M.D., Ph.D., founder and co-scientific director of the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at CHOP. “Long before these children ever receive a learner’s permit, they begin to exhibit a pattern that looks more like the high fatality rates we see for teen drivers.”

Of the nearly 10,000 passenger deaths studied by the CHOP researchers, more than half (54.4 percent) were riding with a driver under age 20; nearly two-thirds were unrestrained; and more than three-quarters of the crashes occurred on roads with posted speed limits above 45-miles-per-hour. Alcohol was also a factor in one-fifth of the fatal crashes. Previous research has shown that as children grow into adolescence, they are more likely to ride in cars with drivers other than their parents, such as classmates, friends, or older siblings.

After controlling for a variety of factors, researchers found key predictors that pose the greatest risk to older child passengers. “Riding with drivers younger than 16 years old, not wearing seat belts, and riding on higher speed roads are the three biggest factors contributing to an older child being killed in a crash,” says Dr. Winston. “Knowing the risks can help parents and teens make smart decisions about which rides are safe, and which ones are off limits.”

“We should not accept teen crash deaths as random accidents,” says Laurette Stiles, vice president of Strategic Resources for State Farm. “These deaths are preventable. Teens, parents and policymakers need to work together to develop a culture of safe, smart passengers by providing guidance, and reinforcing safe behaviors throughout the teen years.”

Researchers recommend these tips to help parents protect their children from an unsafe driving situation:

1. *Insist on seat belts.* All occupants should buckle up on every trip, every time.
2. *Set a good example.* Don't drink and drive, don't talk on the cell phone, and obey the speed limit.
3. *Set rules about safe passenger behaviors.* Discuss what's helpful or distracting to a driver.
4. *Monitor your child's travel.* Know where she is going, how she will get there, whom she is with and when she will be home.
5. *Know and trust the driver.* It's not safe for your child to ride with a teen who has less than one year of driving experience.

In addition, Dr. Winston says that changes in policy, coupled with enforcement, can help to protect teen drivers and their passengers. Optimal graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws that emphasize a lengthened learner's phase beginning at 16, as well as nighttime driving and passenger restrictions during the intermediate phase can help reduce the risk for teens. Primary seat belt laws for all occupants to at least age 18 are also recommended.

*For more information on this study and to find additional tips, parents can visit [www.chop.edu/youngdrivers](http://www.chop.edu/youngdrivers) to download a "Teaching Your Teen to Be a Smart Passenger" tip sheet.*

#### **About The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia**

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia was founded in 1855 as the nation's first pediatric hospital. Through its long-standing commitment to providing exceptional patient care, training new generations of pediatric health care professionals and pioneering major research initiatives, Children's Hospital has fostered many discoveries that have benefited children worldwide. Its pediatric research program is among the largest in the country, ranking third in National Institutes of Health funding. In addition, its unique family-centered care and public service programs have brought the 430-bed hospital recognition as a leading advocate for children and adolescents. For more information, visit [www.chop.edu](http://www.chop.edu).

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