

Policy Summary

Graduated Driver's Licenses

This policy summary is excerpted from:

The June 2015 Report to Congress on the Prevention and Reduction of Underage Drinking

Graduated Driver's Licenses

Policy Description

Graduated driver licensing (GDL) is a system designed to delay full licensure for teenage automobile drivers, thus allowing beginning drivers to gain experience under less risky conditions. Teenagers are targeted because they are at the highest risk for motor vehicle crashes, including alcohol-related crashes. By imposing restrictions on driving privileges, GDL reduces the chances of teenagers driving while intoxicated.

A fully developed GDL system has three stages: a minimum supervised learner's period, an intermediate license (once the driving test is passed) that limits unsupervised driving in high-risk situations, and a full-privilege driver's license available after completion of the first two stages. Beginners must remain in each of the first two stages for set minimum time periods.

The learner's stage has three components:

- Minimum age at which drivers can operate vehicles in the presence of parents, guardians, or other adults
- Minimum holding periods during which learner's permits must be held before drivers advance to the intermediate stage of the licensing process
- Minimum age at which drivers become eligible to drive without adult supervision

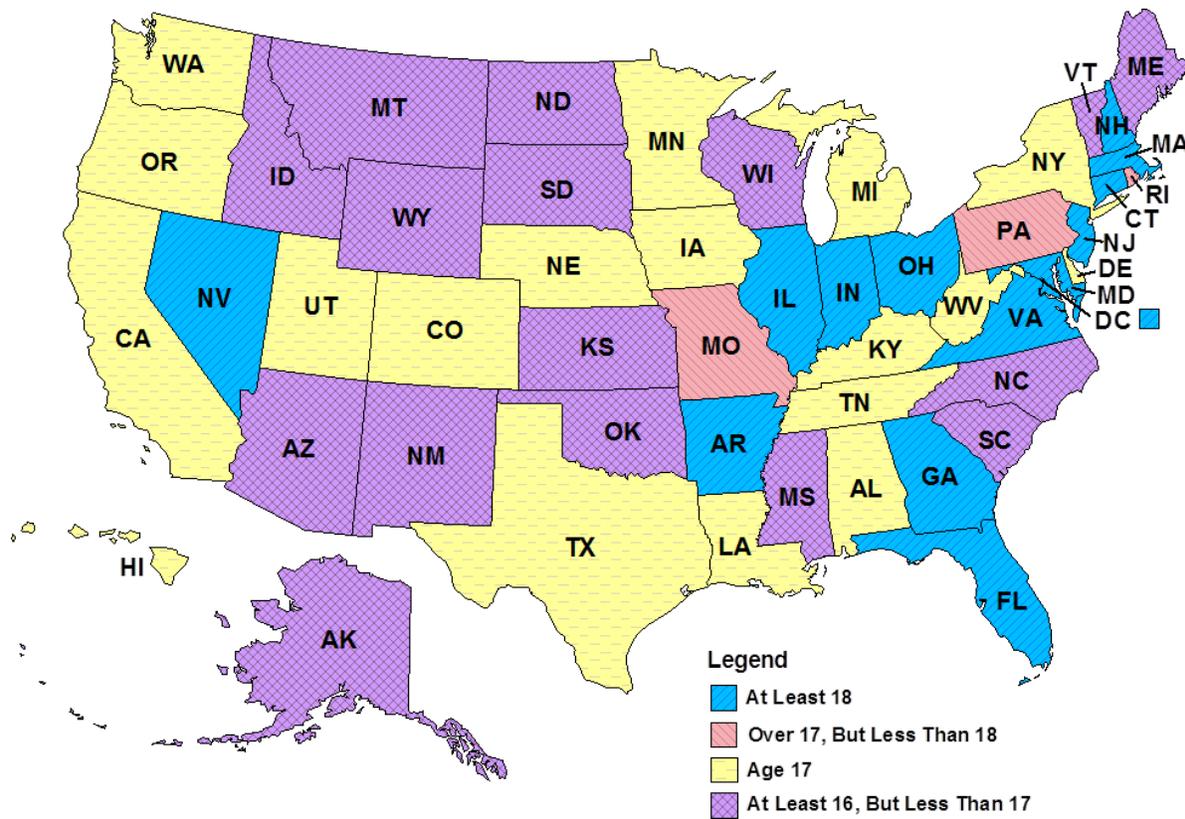
The intermediate stage of GDL law has five components:

- Minimum age at which drivers become eligible to drive without adult supervision
- Unsupervised night-driving prohibitions
- Primary enforcement of night-driving provisions
- Passenger restrictions, which set the total number of passengers allowed in vehicles driven by intermediate-stage drivers
- Primary enforcement of passenger restrictions

“Primary enforcement” refers to the authority given to law enforcement officers to stop drivers for the sole purpose of investigating potential violations of night-driving or passenger restrictions. Law enforcement officers in states without primary enforcement can investigate potential violations of these provisions only as part of an investigation of some other offense. Primary enforcement greatly increases the chance that violators will be detected. The single component for the license stage of GDL is the minimum age at which full licensure occurs and both passenger and night-driving restrictions are lifted.

Status of Graduated Driver Licensing Policies

All 51 jurisdictions have some form of GDL policy and all states have full three-stage criteria (see Exhibit 4.3.15). The minimum ages for each stage and the extent to which the other restrictions are imposed vary across jurisdictions. An important GDL provision related to traffic safety is the minimum age for full licensure. Fourteen jurisdictions allow full licensure on the 18th birthday; three jurisdictions permit it at age above 17 but under 18; and 18 permit it on the 17th birthday. The remaining 16 jurisdictions permit full licensure to those who are under 17 but at least 16 years old. All but one jurisdiction has night-driving restrictions; the hours during

Exhibit 4.3.15: Minimum Age of Full Driving Privileges Laws as of January 1, 2013

which these restrictions apply vary widely among jurisdictions, but fall largely between 6 p.m. and 1 a.m. Thirty-eight jurisdictions have primary enforcement of night-driving restrictions. Forty-six jurisdictions place passenger restrictions on drivers with less than full licensure, and 31 of those have primary enforcement of these restrictions.

Trends in Graduated Driver Licensing Policies

Since the mid-1990s, states enacting three-stage GDL laws have steadily increased (see Exhibit 4.3.16). On January 1, 1996, only one state (Maryland) had such a law, but by 2000, 23 jurisdictions had enacted three-stage GDL laws, and by 2012, that number had risen to 51.

References and Further Information

Legal research for this topic is planned and managed by SAMHSA and conducted under contract by The CDM Group, Inc. Historical data for the years 1996 through 2004 were obtained from “Graduated Driver Licensing Programs and Fatal Crashes of 16 year old Drivers: A National Evaluation” (Baker, S.P., Chen, L.-H., & Li, G. (2006), National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, DOT HS 810 614). Data from January 1, 2005, until December 31, 2008, were obtained from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (http://www.iihs.org/laws/pdf/us_licensing_systems.pdf). Data through January 1, 2013, were collected by SAMHSA. To see definitions of the variables for this policy, go to Appendix B.

Exhibit 4.3.16: Number of States (and District of Columbia) with Three-Stage Graduated Driver Licensing Policies, July 1, 1996, through January 1, 2013

