

# TEEN DRIVERS

## A GUIDE TO NEW MEXICO'S GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSE

This information is provided to explain New Mexico's graduated licensing program. The MVD is the final authority on driver licensing provisions and exceptions to these provisions.

#### Data Sources:

- AAA New Mexico
- Motor Vehicle Division
- Traffic Safety Bureau
- UNM's Division of Government Research
- Reference New Mexico State Statute N.M.S.A. 66-5-8. Provisional licenses; instruction permits; driver education students; temporary licenses.

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# GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSE

All teens under age 18 are subject to a graduated driver licensing system to obtain a driver permit and license in New Mexico.

## What is graduated driver licensing?

Graduated driver licensing eases beginning drivers into traffic by limiting their exposure to driving situations proven to be particularly dangerous. Teens begin driving with certain conditions, which are gradually relaxed as drivers mature and develop greater driving skills.

## Why do we need graduated driver licensing?

Traffic crashes are the leading cause of death among teens in New Mexico. Approximately 5,000 teen drivers are injured or killed every year. Other alarming statistics include:

### Too many teen crashes.

Historically, New Mexico has had among the highest teen crash fatality rates in the country. While teens 15 to 19 years old make up only seven percent of licensed drivers in the state, they're the drivers in the 16 percent of all crashes.

### Too many teen late-night crashes.

Twenty-three percent of crashes involving teenage drivers occur at night.

### Too many teen passengers at risk.

Fifty-eight percent of all teenage passengers in crashes in New Mexico were passengers in cars driven by other teens.

Clearly, too many people are killed or injured in cars driven by teens. Without graduated driver licensing, this situation would grow worse. Projections show New Mexico's teen population growing 13 percent over the next decade.

## The Solution: A Licensing System

New Mexico's graduated driver licensing system deals with the biggest problems facing teen drivers:

Because teens are so highly over-represented in traffic crashes, the law requires young drivers to spend more time behind the wheel to gain the experience needed for safe driving. Teens must hold an instructional permit for six months before applying for a provisional license. During this time, they must log 50 hours of adult-supervised driving practice.

Because nighttime driving poses a greater risk for teens, the instructional permit period requires 10 of the 50 hours of practice to occur during darkness. The law also restricts late-night driving while holding a provisional license.

Because the risk for teen passengers is greater with teen drivers, the law limits under-age-21 passengers who are not members of the teen's immediate family for the duration of the provisional license, until the teen gains more driving experience.

Because teens receive far more traffic citations than older drivers, those applying for a provisional license must not have been convicted of a traffic violation<sup>1</sup> during the previous 90 days. Those applying for a full-unrestricted driver's license must not have been convicted of a traffic violation during the previous 90 days or have a violation pending at the time of application.

<sup>1</sup>A conviction of one or more of the following will prolong advancement through GDL stages: failure to obey traffic-control devices or signals, speeding, homicide by a vehicle, injury to a pregnant woman by a vehicle, DWI, refusal to submit to a chemical test, reckless or careless driving, racing on highways, and failure to yield.

# THE THREE STAGES

Anyone under age 18 applying for an instructional permit must progress through three-stage system to obtain a driver license.

## Stage 1: Instructional Permit To obtain a permit, a teen must:

- Be at least 15 years old.
- Obtain parental or guardian consent.
- Provide identification and other documentation required by MVD.
- Have completed or be enrolled in a state-approved driver education program.
- Pass a written and vision test.
- Pay an application fee.

## Once a permit is obtained, a teen must:

- Hold the instructional permit for at least six months.
- Complete a state-approved driver education program.
- Drive with an adult 21 or older who has been licensed for a minimum of 3 years.
- Complete 50 hours of supervised driving practice, including 10 hours at night. A parent or guardian must certify in writing that these hours have been completed.
- Maintain a clean driving record for the 90 days preceding application for Stage 2.
- Not drink and drive. Even a .02 percent concentration of alcohol in your blood – barely one drink – could result in a 6-month license revocation for drivers under age 21.

## Stage 2: Provisional License To obtain a provisional license, a teen must:

- Complete Stage 1 successfully.
- Be at least 15 1/2 years old.
- Pass a behind-the-wheel driving test.

# PRACTICE DRIVING TIPS

## Be a good role model. Teens learn from watching their parents.

- Always buckle your safety belt properly and make sure everyone in the vehicle is buckled safely.
- Obey traffic laws.
- Don't drink and drive.
- Don't drive aggressively.
- Pay attention. Minimize distractions.

## Use "Commentary Driving"

Ask the new driver to comment on what he/she sees – speed limits, road signs, traffic signals, road conditions, potential hazards – and what driver response is needed. This process works best if the adult driver demonstrates it first for the teen.

## Helpful Guidelines

- Select the route in advance and make a practice run without your teen.
- Make sure your teen understands the objectives of each session before you begin driving.
- Practice in an empty parking lot before moving to streets.
- Progress from residential streets to light traffic to heavy multi-lane traffic and then freeways.
- Monitor traffic (ahead, around, behind).
- Give directions to turn at least one block in advance.
- Use "right" to mean a direction only, not to confirm that something is correct.
- Be specific.
- Use a calm voice and be patient. Remember that mistakes will happen in any learning process.
- Praise your teen's driving accomplishments.

## Include these in your practice.

- **Driving preparation:** dress appropriately (proper shoes, sunglasses); adjust seat and mirrors; use safety belts; start the engine; check gas gauge; check for traffic, signal and move when safe.
- **Basic maneuvers:** moving forward; steering; turning; stopping; backing.
- **Interacting with other vehicles:** turn signals; changing lanes; blind spots; using mirrors; maintaining a safe following distance; monitoring traffic in all directions.
- **Light traffic:** looking ahead; entering/exiting traffic; choosing the proper lane; accepting and yielding right-of-way.
- **Heavy traffic:** adjusting speed and position; using turn lanes; left turn yields.
- **Parking and turning:** angle, hill, parallel parking; U-turns; 3-point turns.
- **Rail crossings:** obey lights and crossing gates; crossing tracks safely.
- **Freeways:** using on-ramps and off-ramps; merging; lane and speed choice.
- **Driving in darkness:** using lights; appropriate speed.
- **Adverse weather:** adjusting speed for rain, fog, wind, dust, snow; using lights.
- **Handling hazards:** obstacles on the road; using flashers; using anti-lock brakes.



# HELPING TEENS TAKE TO THE ROAD

Driving is a complex and often demanding task, even for the best drivers. More supervised practice helps young drivers become more skilled behind the wheel and gives parents greater peace of mind.

## Some resources to help teens practice their driving skills include:

New Mexico Department of Transportation, Traffic Safety Bureau's web site for graduated driver licensing is [www.dgr.unm.edu/gradlicense](http://www.dgr.unm.edu/gradlicense) or call (800) 541-7952.

New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department Motor Vehicle Division's web site is [www.state.nm.us/tax/mvd](http://www.state.nm.us/tax/mvd)

AAA's *Teaching Your Teens to Drive* is available for purchase by calling (800) 327-3444.

This 13-lesson program includes a 50-minute video and handbook that helps teens learn driving tasks such as:

- Basic vehicle control
- Positioning and speed adjustment
- Passing and changing lanes
- Visual search habits
- Freeway and night driving
- Driving on slippery surfaces
- Reducing risks

Check with your insurance company to see if they provide any programs or guidelines to help teenagers learn to drive.

