

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: SB 104 Graduated Driver's Licensing**1. Why have a graduated driver's licensing program in Montana?**

ANSWER: Because Montana teen drivers and passengers are at risk:

- Thirty-five (35) 15-19 year-olds were killed in automobile crashes in Montana in 1997.
- In 1997, 15-20 year-olds accounted for only 10.1% of all licensed Montana drivers, but were involved in 21% of fatal crashes and nearly 35% of all traffic accidents.
- The risk of crash involvement for each mile driven by teenage drivers is four times that of older, more experienced drivers.
- Nationally, in 1996, two-thirds of teen passengers killed were riding in vehicles driven by other teens.
- In 1995, Montana had the second highest fatality ration in the nation in terms of the ratio of fatalities for drivers in the 16-20-age bracket as compared to drivers in the 21-24-age bracket.
- Forty-three percent (43%) of motor vehicle deaths of teens occurred between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m.

2. Will the program be effective in Montana?

ANSWER: Forty-eight states have implemented graduated driver licensing in one form or another. Following implementation of graduated licensing:

- In California, where teen drivers are required to hold a learner's permit for six months and are restricted from having any passengers younger than 20 (excluding immediate family), unless supervised by a 25-year old driver, teenage passenger deaths and injuries from crashes involving 16-year old drivers declined by 40% statewide from 1998 through 2000, the first three years of the California program.
- In Oregon, where teen drivers also have a six-month permit holding requirement and a two-tiered passenger restriction (first six months, no passengers younger than 20 (except family members), and second six months, no more than three passengers younger than 20), those who completed the GDL program experienced 16% fewer crashes during their first year of driving than those male teens who had not received their license under the GDL system.
- In Connecticut, where teen drivers have a four or six month permit holding period and a no passenger (excluding family) restriction for six months, the casualty crash rate for 16 year old drivers dropped 22%.
- In North Carolina, where teen drivers have a twelve month permit holding requirement, nighttime restrictions from 9 P.M. to 5 A.M., and a one passenger younger than 21 restriction unless family, there was a 57% reduction in the "per capita fatal crash rate," a 28% reduction in the "per capita injury crash rate", and a 19% reduction in "per driver crash rate".

3. Who benefits from a graduated driver's licensing program?

ANSWER: By providing a safe environment for developing and improving the driving skills for Montana's youth, graduated licensing benefits your drivers, their parents, as well as the rest of Montana's citizens. First, it allows the youth of Montana the ability to obtain valuable driving experience in more favorable conditions, while at the same time decreasing the opportunities for them to be involved in serious and/or fatal motor vehicle accidents. Secondly, graduated licensing protects other Montana drivers by not allowing high-risk drivers unrestricted driving privileges. Moreover, graduated licensing has also proven to be financially beneficial in that those insured in states with established programs have realized a significant impact on insurance premiums.

4. Does graduated licensing create a problem for law enforcement?

ANSWER: No. Law enforcement is already involved with teen drivers in the normal course of their duties. Although SB104 does not make violation of graduated licensing restrictions a secondary offense in terms of enforcement, the reality is that enforcement of the graduated licensing law in most situations will be incidental to the investigation of another violation or perceived safety concern.

5. How does SB 104 accommodate farm/ranch Montana kids?

ANSWER: SB 104 does not allow farm/ranch kids to drive any earlier than city kids. However, it does provide them a benefit under Section 3 by allowing them to drive during the restricted hours for the sole purpose of transporting farm or ranch products, machinery, or supplies within 150 miles of the farm/ranch headquarters. BS 104 does not otherwise impact the hardship permits authorized by: 61-5-105(1)(b), MCA.

6. Does graduated licensing infringe upon the rights of parents to set their own limits on teen drivers, and aren't parents already doing this?

ANSWER: The statistics speak for themselves. Montana teen drivers are already a greater risk than older drivers due to their relative inexperience and sense of invincibility. Although some parents, including some in the Legislature, informally impose limitations on when, where, and how a teen driver can use the family car that is not a universal occurrence. Your teenager may be riding with a teen driver where parents do not impose similar restrictions. For parents who are struggling with setting limits for their teen drivers, graduated licensing gives them a construct within which to operate. Moreover, graduated licensing is a tool that allows teen drivers to resist some of the peer pressure associated with ill-advised car usage.

7. Does this bill infringe upon a teen driver's ability to make responsible decisions?

ANSWER: No. This bill is about inexperience behind the wheel. It is about providing a safe environment for developing and improving the driving skills of Montana's youth. It allows the youth of Montana the ability to obtain valuable driving experience in more favorable conditions, while at the same time decreasing the opportunities for them to be involved in serious an/or fatal motor vehicle accidents. Just because a teen driver may be responsible in other aspects of his/her life, such responsibility does not necessarily transfer to driving skills or experience.

8. Is a separate fee required at each stage of licensure as a teen moves from one status to another?

ANSWER: No. The fees for a driver's license will not change under SB 104. The current fee will be paid up front when a teen driver initially applies for an instruction permit.

9. How many times does a driver have to visit the DMV before becoming an unrestricted driver?

ANSWER: An under 18-year old applicant who goes through a traffic education program would typically visit an exam station once, when the applicant submits the formal application for a driver's license, which begins the one-year restriction period. The first state of the process starts within the traffic education program upon issuance of the traffic education learner's license (TELL) by the traffic education teacher.

For an under 18-year old applicant who doesn't go through a traffic education program, the applicant would come to the exam station twice – once to take the knowledge test and receive an instruction permit, and then again, six months later or more to take the road/skills test and complete the application process for a driver's license.