

State laws dampen texting by teen drivers but rates still high

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State laws banning texting while driving led to significant reductions in the number of teens using their cell phones while behind the wheel, but nearly one-third still admitted to engaging in this risky behavior, according to new research to be presented at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in San Diego.

Texting while driving has been found to increase the risk of a crash more than 20-fold, suggesting that it is more dangerous than driving while intoxicated. Adolescents already are at increased risk of having a serious car accident because they are relatively inexperienced drivers, and texting while driving markedly elevates that risk.

In 2011, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey asked [teens](#) for the first time about texting while driving in the past 30 days. The survey of a nationally representative sample of [high school students](#) is conducted every two years by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Investigators used data from the 2011 and 2013 surveys to determine whether [state laws](#) banning texting while driving were effective in changing teens' behavior. They also looked at the relationship between driver age and experience on texting while driving.

Fourteen states passed laws banning texting while driving between 2011 and 2013. Responses from 1,566 teens in 2011 and 1,353 teens in 2013 showed the texting rate dropped significantly from 43.1 percent of teens

in 2011 when no bans were in effect to 30.6 percent of teens in 2013 when texting while driving was illegal.

"Despite [public health campaigns](#) and laws banning texting while driving in most states, texting while driving was four times more common among U.S. high school students than driving while under the influence of alcohol (41.4 percent vs. 10 percent)," said principal investigator Alexis Tchaconas, research assistant, developmental and behavioral pediatrics, Steven and Alexandra Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York. "Although laws that ban texting while driving appear to be somewhat effective in reducing this dangerous behavior by teen drivers, much more needs to be done to effectively eliminate this major distraction."

The second analysis showed that texting while driving was nearly five times higher among experienced drivers (defined as more than one year older than the age of initial driver license eligibility in their state) than new drivers. In addition, the risky behavior was more common among 16-year-olds than 15-year-olds.

"Tragically, smartphones still allow teens to do stupid things while driving a car," said senior investigator Andrew Adesman, MD, FAAP, chief, developmental and behavioral pediatrics, Cohen Children's Medical Center. "It is unfortunate that the smart engineers that make these phones don't restrict or disable [texting](#) features when the phone is traveling more than 5 mph. As a parent and as a pediatrician, I would love to see some parental controls built into smartphones so that teenagers cannot be distracted while [driving](#)."

More information: Ms. Tchaconas will present "Immediate Impact of Newly Implemented Texting While Driving Laws on Teenagers in the United States, 2011-2013" from 5:15-5:30 p.m. PT Sunday, April 26. To view the study abstract, visit

http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS15L1_2795.8

She also will present "A Comparison of Texting While Driving by Teenagers: Driver Age and Experience" during a poster session from 1-4 p.m. PT Saturday, April 25. To view the study abstract, go to

http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS15L1_1533.251

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