

Young and New Driver RESOURCE CENTRE



DRIVER EDUCATION

WHAT IS DRIVER EDUCATION?

Driver education and behind the wheel training are efficient means for new drivers to learn how to drive and develop their driving skills in a controlled and safe environment. Driver education has existed since the automobile was first invented and remains popular today.

WHO OFFERS DRIVER EDUCATION?

Driver education is offered by high schools and commercial organizations (including safety agencies), and in some cases a combination of the two. Driver education courses are not typically offered by governments, but are often developed and regulated by them.

HOW LONG ARE DRIVER EDUCATION COURSES?

Typically driver education courses in the United States include 30 hours of classroom teaching and 6 hours of on-road training, while Canada has 25 hours of classroom teaching and 10 hours of on-road training; however, this can vary widely depending on the course selected.

WHY DO PEOPLE ENROL IN DRIVER EDUCATION?

Some enrol in driver education for lower insurance rates; to better prepare themselves for a driving test; to practice behind the wheel; and to shorten the graduated driver licensing (GDL) phase of driving. Another popular reason for enrolling is to become a better and safer driver; however, this benefit has not yet been demonstrated by research.

ARE THE SAFETY BENEFITS OF DRIVER EDUCATION PROVEN?

In the 1960's, a major study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) entitled the "DeKalb" project and several subsequent studies in the United States, Canada, and other countries found that, at best, driver education had only small, short-term benefits, and at worst, was not associated with reliable or significant decreases in crash involvement. More recent research in the 1990s and 2000s has also yet to provide definitive findings on the safety benefits of driver education.

IS DRIVER EDUCATION BEING IMPROVED?

Various initiatives are underway to improve driver education in terms of content and delivery. It is also being integrated into the GDL system. Further evaluations are being conducted to see what driver education programs work, and how the effective features can be standardized.

IS DRIVER EDUCATION A SUBSTITUTE FOR PARENTAL SUPERVISION?

Substituting driver education for parental supervision may undermine the safety benefits of GDL. Ideally, driver education should be used to complement supervised driving with parents. The Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) recommends at least 50 hours of supervised driving, with at least 10 hours of night driving and 10 different hours in winter conditions.

HOW DO "TIME DISCOUNTS" RELATE TO DRIVER EDUCATION?

With the advent of GDL programs in the 1990s, several jurisdictions began offering time discounts for drivers who take driver education courses. These time discounts allow those enrolled in driver education to obtain their full licence faster than non-enrolled drivers, typically shortening the GDL program by 36 months. Currently the use of these discounts is highly controversial as it reduces the learner phase of GDL, which is considered the most important part of the GDL program.

ARE THERE ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN DRIVER EDUCATION?

The content and delivery of driver education continues to evolve. Multi-staged driver education, first proposed by NHTSA in 1994, is also being considered. It involves an initial phase to teach basic vehicle handling skills, followed by a second phase to teach safe driving procedures. To date, only the state of Michigan has embraced this new format. Research on the success of Michigan's program is still ongoing. Evaluations of improved driver education programs are underway in several jurisdictions.

HOW OFTEN DO YOUNG DRIVERS CRASH?

Please see our fact sheet on GDL.