

Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL)

Fact Sheet

- **What is GDL?** – Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) is a safety system that provides new drivers with the opportunity to gain driving experience under controlled conditions that minimize exposure to risk.
- **Why do we need GDL?** – Novice drivers, particularly young ones, crash more often than older, more experienced drivers. GDL targets this group to reduce their collisions, injuries, and fatalities.
- **How often do young drivers crash?** – In Canada, the collision risk of 16-19 year olds is four times higher than 25-34 year olds, and nine times that of 45-54 year olds. In 2006 alone, 353 teenagers (aged 15-19) and 360 young adults (aged 20-24) died in road crashes. A further 24,594 teenagers and 26,730 young adults were injured.
- **Where is GDL used?** – GDL is widely used in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Certain aspects of GDL programs are also being adopted in several European and Middle Eastern countries (e.g. Israel).
- **How long has GDL existed?** – The premise and rationale for GDL was first recognized in a 1976 Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) paper entitled, *The Young Driver Paradox*. However, the first systems were not implemented in North America until the 1990s.
- **What are some characteristics of GDL programs?** – GDL systems are best known for having two or more licensing stages. The first stage (learner), involves supervised driving for several months to a year. When this stage is completed, drivers move on to the intermediate or novice stage where they can drive unsupervised but with certain restrictions. Upon completion of this stage, drivers exit the GDL system and become fully licensed. Some of the limitations and restrictions that are characteristic of GDL programs involve minimum entry ages and duration periods, maximum holding periods, blood-alcohol level restrictions, night driving restrictions, passenger restrictions, “n” signs in/on the vehicle or plates, exit requirements, and minimum exit ages.
- **How long are GDL programs?** – GDL programs typically last 1 ½ to 2 years. This can vary depending on entry/exit requirements and time discounts offered for driver education.
- **Does GDL work?** – A substantial body of research demonstrates that GDL works, proving it has saved many lives and prevented many injuries. At least 15 GDL evaluations have been conducted in New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, and all have shown positive benefits, with overall reductions in young and novice driver crashes ranging from 4% to 60%.
- **Do drivers in GDL programs still crash?** – Drivers in GDL programs still crash and they do so at unacceptable levels. This is due to several factors: some GDL programs are relatively weak; some drivers don’t adhere to GDL restrictions; and also because young and novice drivers crash under conditions that are not covered by GDL programs (e.g. weather conditions, drowsy driving, hit by another driver, etc.).
- **What are the best practices in GDL?** – In late 2005, TIRF released *Best Practices for Graduated Driver Licensing in Canada*. The report provides a best practices model of a GDL system, based on sound research. The report also provides detailed information on various Canadian, American, and Australian programs.