

Why are youth at greater risk of road crashes?



Youth and young adults are killed in road crashes at a higher rate than any other age group under 75 years old. With road crashes being the third-leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 24 years old, this age demographic has the highest rate of involvement in fatal collisions per 100,000 licensed drivers.

National Teen Driver Safety Week (NTDSW) is a youth-led awareness week designed to build public awareness of teen driver safety issues and encourage young people to spearhead solutions that will improve road safety for all. Parachute will run NTDSW from October 15 to October 21, 2023, focusing on youth as changemakers.

Join the conversation on social media, using the hashtags # **OurFutureRoads** and # **NTDSW2023**.

Road crash risk factors for youth

Youth are likely to engage in risky driving behaviours that can result in fines, loss of their driver's licence, injury and even death. Here are some reasons that youth are at a greater risk of road crashes:

- **Peer and parental influence:** Peers can encourage unsafe driving behaviours, such as speeding or impaired driving, by praising or egging on a young driver, or they can discourage unsafe behaviour by disapproving of it. Young people are also more likely to follow the rules of the road if they believe they will get in trouble with their parents.
- **Distracted driving:** Young drivers are more likely than middle-aged drivers to drive while distracted due to inexperience, maturity level and overestimating their ability to multitask.
- **Driver inexperience:** An inexperienced driver may not understand road rules, not be able to safely handle dangerous driving situations and have less ability to control the vehicle.

- **Brain development:** The brain does not fully develop until the age of 25. This can lead to poor judgment and organization, poor planning and decision-making, and more impulsive actions, which can all play a role in risky driving behaviour.
- **Attitudes toward cannabis, alcohol, and driving:** Young people aged 16 to 24 report more cannabis use than other age groups in Canada and up to 25 per cent of 16- to 24-year-old cannabis users say they've driven after smoking, vaping or ingesting cannabis. Many youth people perceive that cannabis has limited effects on driving. Young drivers may also be inexperienced about the effects of alcohol, putting youth at a further increased risk of crashing while driving under the influence. Drivers aged 20 to 24 had the highest rate of alcohol impaired driving in 2019, according to police data.
- **Speeding:** Speeding is involved in one-third of young driver deaths in Canada. Speeding leads to decreased reaction time, requires a longer time to stop the vehicle and makes it harder for the driver to steer safely around obstacles.
- **Seatbelts:** In 2021, 29 per cent of drivers and 36 per cent of passengers killed in serious crashes in Canada were not wearing seatbelts. Those least likely to wear seatbelts include young male drivers and passengers, and drivers aged 18 to 24.

Vision Zero and the Safe Systems Approach

Vision Zero is the philosophy that road fatalities and serious injuries are unacceptable, and can and should be eliminated while providing safe, healthy and equitable mobility for all road users. Vision Zero takes a Safe System Approach, which is an integrated and comprehensive process to improve the safety performance of the transportation system that makes allowance for errors and eliminates predictable and preventable serious injuries and fatalities.

This type of approach to road safety helps to shift the conversation from victim-blaming young people to encouraging their empowerment to make real change in their communities. Young people are powerful stakeholders in road safety and must be integral to developing solutions that keep them, their families and communities safe on the road. For more information, see our key messages on youth engagement in road safety.

For more information about NTDSW visit: parachute.ca/ntdsw

#OurFutureRoads #NTDSW2023

For sources of statistics used, see parachute.ca/NTDSW-stats