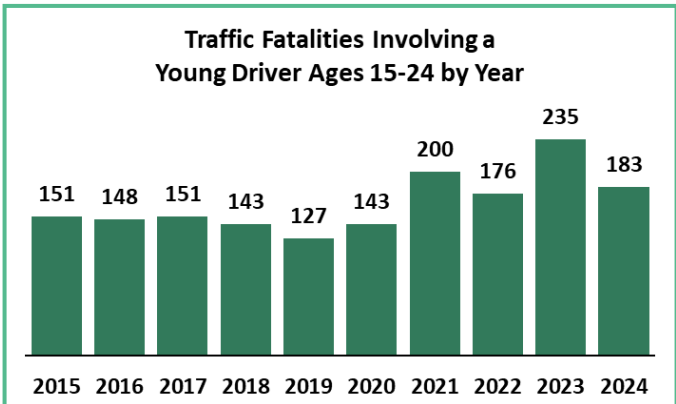
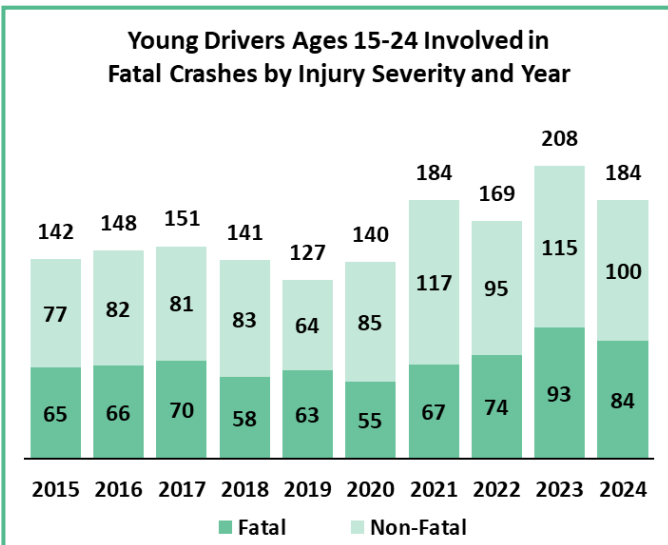




Young Drivers Ages 15-24 Involved in Fatal Crashes

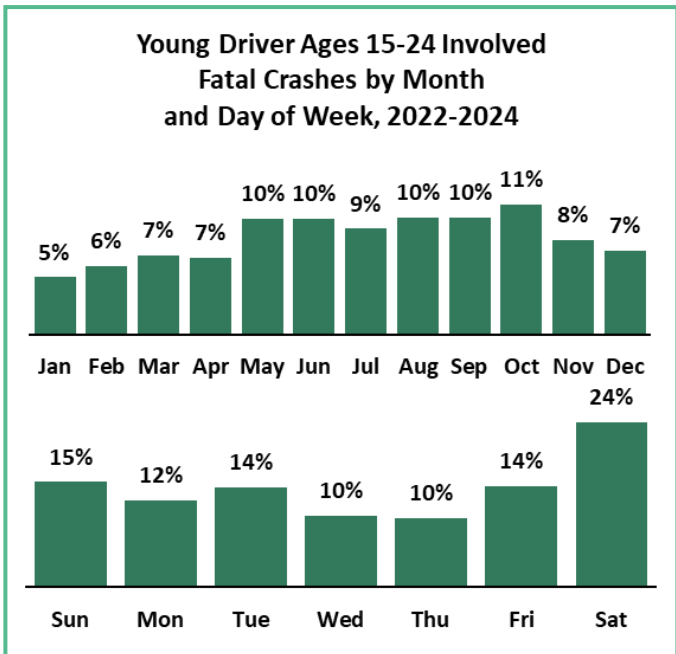
Young drivers represent a unique driving population due to their limited experience and greater tendency to engage in risky driving behaviors¹. Since 2015, 1,594 young drivers ages 15-24 have been involved in fatal crashes in Washington². Although young drivers represent about 11 percent of Washington’s driving population on average, nearly one out of every five drivers involved in a fatal crash were between the ages of 15 and 24². While young driver involvement in a fatal crash does not imply that they were responsible for the crash, they may have lacked the skills and experience necessary to recognize and respond to risk appropriately.

I care, because there have been 594 traffic fatalities involving a young driver from 2022-2024⁴. Of these fatalities, two-thirds (66%) were the young driver or occupant of the young driver’s vehicle. Traffic fatalities involving a young driver spiked in 2023, reaching a ten-year high of 235 before decreasing by 22 percent in 2024.



In Washington, licensing and legal restrictions vary by age. Drivers ages 15-17 are subject to the Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) program, which is designed to help new drivers gain experience under lower-risk conditions. The GDL program prohibits new drivers from late night driving and transporting minor passengers during their first six months of driving. Drivers ages 18-20 are not subject to the GDL program, allowing them to obtain a full license immediately and giving them greater independence behind the wheel. Drivers ages 21-24 are also excused from the GDL program and represent a uniquely different age group as they are legally permitted to buy and consume alcohol and cannabis, representing a key transition in legal status and social responsibility.

Most fatal crashes involving a young driver occurred between May and October, coinciding with the ‘100 deadliest days of summer’. The months with the most fatal crashes involving a young driver were October (11%), May (10%), June (10%), August (10%), and September (10%)². Young driver involved fatal crashes most frequently occurred on Saturdays (24%), followed by Sundays (15%).

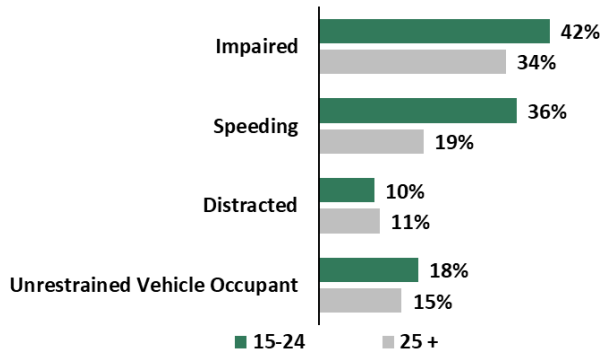




Young Drivers Ages 15-24 Involved in Fatal Crashes

Young drivers tend to be more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors compared to drivers ages 25 and older. Nearly half (42%) of young drivers involved in fatal crashes were impaired by alcohol and/or drugs—compared to one-third (34%) of drivers ages 25 and older³. More than a third (36%) of young drivers were speeding at the time of the fatal crash—nearly double the amount (19%) of drivers ages 25 and older. Slightly more young drivers (18%) were not wearing a seat belt (i.e. unrestrained) at the time of the fatal crash compared to drivers ages 25 and older (15%). There were not notable differences for distracted driving between young drivers and drivers ages 25 and older.

High-Risk Behaviors among Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age, 2022-2024

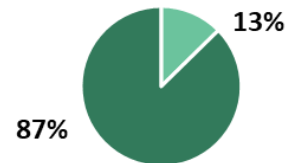


Frequently, multiple high-risk behaviors are observed among young drivers involved in fatal crashes. For example, among impaired young drivers, half (50%) were speeding and one in three (34%) vehicle occupants were unrestrained². High-risk behavior involvement in fatal crashes varies even within young drivers across age, which is described in more detail in the following pages.

Most (87%) young drivers involved in a single vehicle crash were either impaired, speeding, distracted, or not wearing a seat belt². More than half (53%) of young driver involved fatal crashes were multi-vehicle crashes. In nearly two-thirds (62%) of multi-vehicle crashes, the young driver was either impaired, speeding, distracted, or not wearing a seat belt.

Young Drivers Ages 15-24 Involved in Fatal Crashes by High-Risk Behaviors* Present and Crash Type, 2022-2024

Single-Vehicle Crashes



Multi-Vehicle Crashes

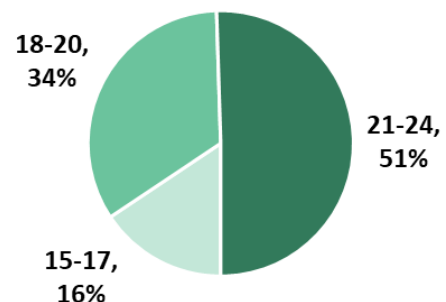


- No Young Driver High-Risk Behaviors
- Yes, Young Driver High-Risk Behaviors

*High-risk behaviors include impairment, speeding, distraction, and not wearing a seat belt.

Among young drivers involved in fatal crashes, most (83%) held a valid driver's license at the time of the crash². However, 13% were unlicensed, and an additional 5% had a license that was expired, revoked, or suspended. Prior crash involvement was common with one in four (26%) young drivers having been involved in at least one crash in the previous five years, compared to one in five (22%) drivers ages 25 and older³. The majority (51%) of young drivers involved in fatal crashes were ages 21-24, followed by ages 18-20 (34%) and then ages 15-17 (16%)².

Proportion of Young Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age, 2022-2024

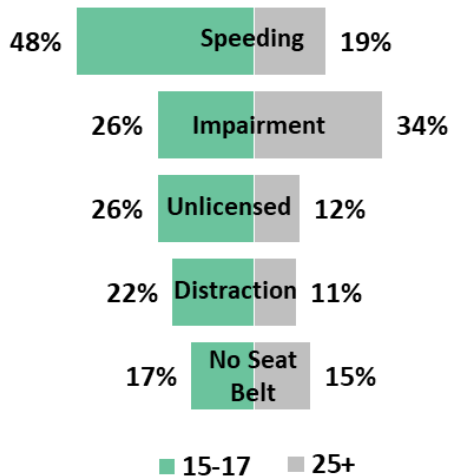




Young Drivers Ages 15-17 Involved in Fatal Crashes

Drivers ages 15-17 are characterized by being subject to GDL restrictions, likely still living with their parents or guardians and therefore subject to their rules, perhaps more receptive to positive peer influence, and legally restricted from purchasing and consuming alcohol and cannabis and entering bars. From 2022-2024, there were 82 drivers ages 15-17 involved in a fatal crash². The majority (73%) were male. Half (50%) were age 17, while more than a third (39%) were age 16 and one in ten (11%) were age 15.

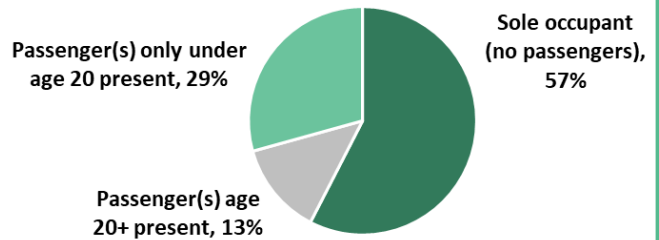
High-Risk Behaviors among Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age, 2022-2024



Speeding was the most prevalent high-risk behavior among drivers ages 15-17 involved in fatal crashes with half of drivers speeding—more than double the number of all other drivers age 25 and older³. Impairment was the second most prevalent high-risk behavior, tied with driving while unlicensed. Impaired driving tends to be less common among drivers ages 15-17 due in part to legal restrictions, limited access to alcohol and cannabis, and deterrence associated with Washington’s zero-tolerance alcohol and cannabis law for drivers under the age of 21 ([RCW 46.61.503](#)). Nevertheless, one in four drivers ages 15-17 involved in a fatal crash were impaired. Distraction was the fourth most prevalent high-risk behavior with one in five drivers ages 15-17 involved in a fatal crash being distracted—twice the amount of all other drivers age 25 and older.

According to Washington’s GDL restrictions⁵, drivers under the age of 18 are prohibited for the first six months from driving with any passengers under the age of 20 except for immediate family. The next six months, they are prohibited from driving with more than three passengers under the age of 20 except for immediate family. These restrictions expire after one year of violation-free driving. Nearly half (43%) of drivers ages 15-17 had a passenger in their vehicle at the time of the fatal crash². Drivers ages 15-17 had only passengers under the age of 20 in just over a quarter (29%) of fatal crashes.

Vehicle Occupants of Drivers Ages 15-17 Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2022-2024



GDL drivers under the age of 18 are also prohibited from driving between 1:00am and 5:00am unless accompanied by a licensed driver age 25 or older⁵. This restriction expires after one year of violation-free driving. Ten percent of fatal crashes involving a 15-17 year-old driver occurred between 1:00am and 5:00am without a passenger age 25 or older present in the young drivers vehicle.

Among fatal crashes involving a driver ages 15-17 from 2022-2024²:

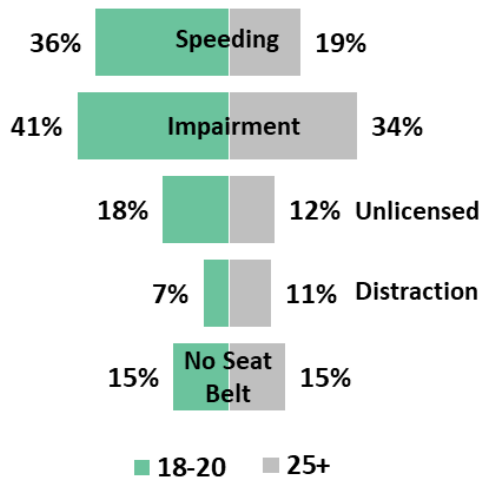
- ⇒ The months with the most fatal crashes were July (14%), June (11%), and October (11%).
- ⇒ Nearly half (44%) occurred on a Friday or Saturday.
- ⇒ Nearly half (43%) occurred between 6pm and midnight.
- ⇒ Half (52%) were single-vehicle crashes.
- ⇒ One-third (35%) occurred on a county road.



Young Drivers Ages 18-20 Involved in Fatal Crashes

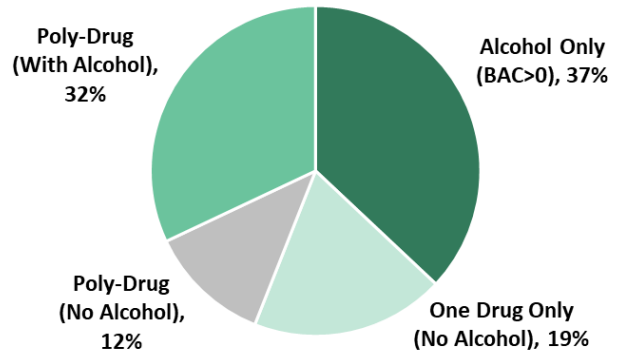
Drivers ages 18-20 are characterized by being able to acquire a drivers license without being subjected to a GDL program and its restrictions, may not have parental oversight of driving anymore, likely living away from home and gaining more independence, and being legally restricted from purchasing alcohol or cannabis and entering bars. From 2022-2024, there were 188 drivers ages 18-20 involved in a fatal crash². The majority (75%) were male. The age distribution was generally even with about one-third age 18 (29%), another third (34%) age 19, and just over a third (36%) age 20.

High-Risk Behaviors among Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age, 2022-2024



Despite the inability to legally purchase or consume alcohol or cannabis and enter bars, impairment was the most prevalent high-risk behavior among drivers ages 18-20 involved in fatal crashes with nearly half of drivers being impaired by either alcohol and/or drugs². Speeding was the second most prevalent high-risk behavior accounting for just over one-third of drivers ages 18-20. This was nearly twice the number of all other drivers ages 25 and older. Nearly one in five drivers ages 18-20 were unlicensed at the time of the crash. Distracted driving was relatively lower among drivers ages 18-20 compared to all other drivers ages 25 and older.

Impairment Type among Impaired Drivers Ages 18-20 Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2022-2024



Among drivers that were impaired, more than a third (37%) were positive for alcohol only (BAC>0)². One in five (19%) were positive for one drug only (no alcohol). Nearly half (44%) were poly-drug positive, meaning they were positive for alcohol and one or more drugs, or multiple drugs without alcohol. Alcohol, followed by cannabis, were by far the most common substances present among impaired drivers ages 18-20⁶. Among alcohol positive drivers ages 18-20, the majority (80%) had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) at or above Washington’s per se limit of 0.08 ng/ml. The median BAC among this group was 0.128 ng/ml. Two out of three (64%) impaired drivers ages 18-20 were involved in a single-vehicle crash. In contrast, one in three (32%) drivers ages 18-20 that were not impaired were involved in a single-vehicle crash.

Among fatal crashes involving a driver ages 18-20 from 2022-2024²:

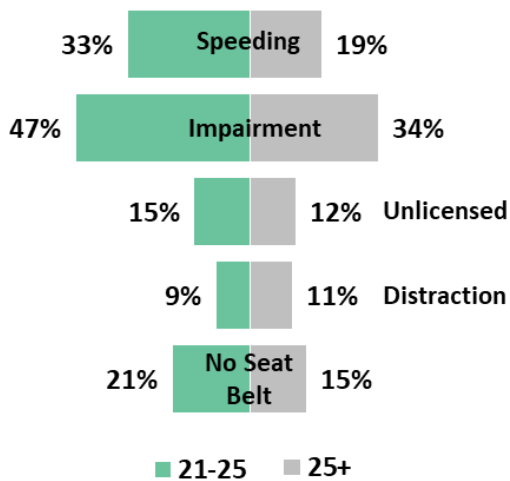
- ⇒ The months with the most fatal crashes were August (13%), July (11%), and October (11%).
- ⇒ More than one-third (39%) occurred on a Saturday or Sunday.
- ⇒ Nearly half (43%) occurred between 9pm and 3am.
- ⇒ Half (51%) were single-vehicle crashes.
- ⇒ One-third (30%) occurred on a county road.



Young Drivers Ages 21-24 Involved in Fatal Crashes

Drivers ages 21-25 are characterized by having the most independence among young drivers, they are legally able to purchase and consume alcohol and cannabis, they can enter bars and other drinking establishments, and they may acquire a drivers license without being subjected to a GDL program and its restrictions. From 2022 to 2024, there were 291 drivers ages 21-24 involved in a fatal crash². The majority (74%) were male. About one in three (30%) were age 22, and about one in four were either ages 21 (24%), 23 (23%), or 24(23%).

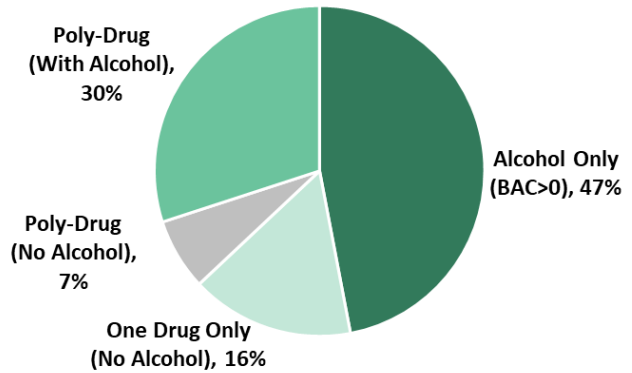
High-Risk Behaviors among Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes by Age, 2022-2024



Impairment was the most prevalent high-risk behavior among drivers ages 21-24 involved in fatal crashes². Nearly half of drivers ages 21-24 were impaired by either alcohol and/or drugs. Speeding was the second most prevalent high-risk behavior, accounting for one out of three drivers ages 21-24 involved in fatal crashes. Not wearing a seat belt was the third most prevalent high-risk behavior, accounting for one out of five drivers ages 21-24.

One in three drivers ages 21-24 involved in a fatal crash had been in a previous crash in the past five years, which was notably higher than all other drivers ages 25 and older (22%)³. One in three (34%) drivers ages 21-24 had passengers in their vehicle at the time of the fatal crash, which was lower than drivers ages 18-20 (42%) and 15-17 (43%).

Impairment Type among Impaired Drivers Ages 21-24 Involved in Fatal Crashes, 2022-2024



Among drivers ages 21-24 that were impaired, nearly half (47%) were positive for alcohol only (BAC>0)². One in six were positive for one drug only (no alcohol). More than a third (37%) were poly-drug positive, meaning they were positive for alcohol and one or more drugs, or multiple drugs without alcohol. Alcohol, followed by cannabis, were by far the most common substances present among impaired drivers ages 21-24⁶.

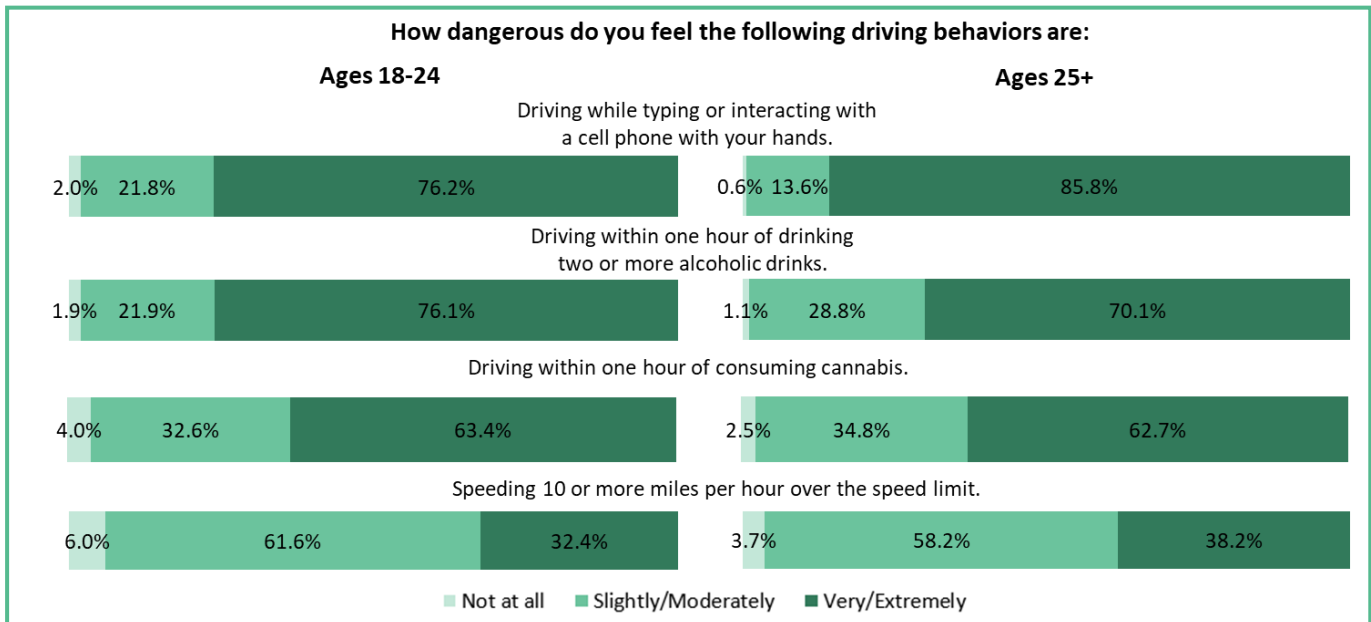
The median blood alcohol concentration (BAC) among alcohol positive drivers ages 21-24 was 0.15 ng/ml—nearly twice Washington’s per se limit of 0.08 ng/ml⁶. Thirteen percent of impaired drivers ages 21-24 had a prior driving under the influence (DUI) conviction in the past five years. Motorcycle drivers represented sixteen percent of impaired drivers ages 21-24.

Among fatal crashes involving a driver ages 21-24 from 2022-2024²:

- ⇒ The months with the most fatal crashes were May (13%), October (12%), and August (12%).
- ⇒ One in four (23%) occurred on a Saturday.
- ⇒ One in four (23%) occurred between 9pm and midnight.
- ⇒ More than half (57%) were multi-vehicle crashes.
- ⇒ Nearly one in three (29%) occurred on a county road.



Washingtonians (18+) Traffic Safety Attitudes & Behaviors



Survey results show that young Washingtonians ages 18-24 tend to perceive certain risky driving behaviors as less dangerous compared to adults ages 25 and older. The majority of respondents recognized the danger of driving while typing or interacting with a cell phone, but fewer young respondents perceived this as very/extremely dangerous (76%) compared to adults (86%). Most respondents also understood the danger of driving within an hour of drinking two or more alcoholic drinks. In contrast, more young respondents perceived this as very/extremely dangerous (76%) compared to adults (70%)⁷.

Perceived risk decreased for all respondents when it came to driving after consuming cannabis. About 63 percent of both young and adult respondents perceived this as very/extremely dangerous. However, four percent of young respondents perceived this as not at all dangerous compared to 2.5 percent among adults. Speeding was the driving behavior with the lowest perception of severe danger among both young and adult respondents. Fewer young respondents perceived this as very/extremely dangerous (32%) compared to adults (38%). Six percent of young respondents perceived this as not at all dangerous, compared to 3.7 percent of adults.

Among young (18-24) daily drivers surveyed⁷:

- ⇒ The majority (93%) had not driven under the influence of alcohol in the past 12 months
- ⇒ One in four (24%) reported that they often/always speed while driving in the past 30 days.
- ⇒ Just over half (54%) reported that they never drive while typing or interacting with their phone.
- ⇒ The majority (90%) usually/always wear a seat belt.

Data Sources

¹[Young Drivers and Adolescent Neurocognitive Brain Development](#)

²[Young Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Dashboard](#)

³[Drivers Involved in Fatal Crashes Dashboard](#)

⁴[Traffic Fatalities Dashboard](#)

⁵[DOL, Intermediate license restrictions](#)

⁶[Impairment Dashboard](#)

⁷[Statewide Traffic Safety Survey Dashboard](#)

For more information, please visit the WTSC Data Dashboards <https://wtsc.wa.gov/dashboards/>, or contact the WTSC Research and Data Division at (360) 725-9860.