



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Staying Safe WITH Teens Behind the Wheel

PATTY RITCHIE June 8, 2015

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### **Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column**

With summer vacation approaching for students, more and more teens are taking to the roads. In fact, the period between Memorial Day and Labor Day marks the busiest time of the year for teen drivers, not to mention the most dangerous. It's known as the "100 Deadliest Days," a time frame when we see a spike in the number of crashes involving teens. According to AAA, in 2013, an average of 220 teen drivers and passengers died in each of the summer months, representing a 43 percent increase compared to the remainder of the year.

If you're the parent of a teen driver, there are steps you can take—and discussions you can have with your child—to help make sure they stay as safe as possible while out on the roads in the coming months:

***Don't drink and drive:*** It goes without saying that nobody—teens included—should get behind the wheel after drinking. While the percentage of teens in high school who drink and drive has decreased by more than half since 1991, it's still vitally important to stress to your teen the danger of drinking and driving.

***Buckle up:*** Make sure your teen knows to buckle up every time they're driving or riding as a passenger. Of the teens who died in passenger vehicle crashes in 2012, roughly 55 percent

weren't wearing a seat belt at the time of the accident.

***Put the phone away:*** Texting while driving is a huge problem, especially for teens. In fact, research shows that on average, texting causes drivers to divert their focus from the road for nearly five seconds—that's the amount of time it would take to drive the length of a full football field. Make sure your teen knows that their phone is off limits when they're behind the wheel. Encourage them to put it out of reach in the backseat anytime they are driving.

***Limit passengers:*** It's estimated that having a single teen passenger in the vehicle of a new driver can double the risk of an accident. Set rules for your teen and limit the number of passengers allowed in their vehicle.

***Teach your teen to drive defensively:*** Make sure your teen knows the basics of defensive driving—stay at least one car length behind the car in front of you, always be aware of traffic and pedestrians around you, don't speed, check your mirrors regularly, adapt to road conditions and make sure to always use your lights and turn signals when necessary.

Whether you're the parent of a teen driver, or someone who travels frequently during the summer months, there are steps we all can take to ensure our roads stay as safe as possible. Best wishes for a safe summer!