

Parent's Guide on Junior Operator License Laws: Help Your Teen Driver Be Safe. Not Sorry.

Know Your Role

Congratulations! Your teen has just obtained his or her Junior Operator's License, which means a little more freedom for both of you.

However, responsibility for your teen's safety does not end once you hand over the keys. Now is the time to be the most vigilant to ensure that your teenager obeys driving rules and the restrictions of the Junior Operator License law.

Enforcement of the law and safe driving habits begin at home where you play the biggest role. You can help the RMV and police keep your son or daughter safe behind the wheel.

The Junior Operator License is provisional and gives your teen time to continue his or her training. Set a strong driving example and be clear about what you expect when he/she is in the driver's seat.

Tips to Keep Your Teen Safe

- **Insist on seat belts.**
- **Always practice good driving behavior** so that you are a model for your teen driver.
- **Forbid use of a cell phone while driving** - It's against the law for a Junior Operator to use a cell phone to talk, text, or do anything else while driving (except report an emergency).
- **Forbid drowsy driving**
- **Create a Contract** with your teen driver that explains his or her responsibilities or use the Young Driver-Parent/Guardian Contract on www.massrmv.com.
- **Enforce the rules you set with your teen.**

Junior Operator Driving Restrictions

The Passenger Restriction prevents a Junior Operator from carrying passengers under the age of 18 (except for siblings) during the first six months that the driver has his/her license. This restriction was designed to reduce the number of distractions that an inexperienced driver may face while driving.

The Night Restriction prevents a Junior Operator from driving between 12:30 am and 5:00 am, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Accident rates for young drivers are higher late at night when they may be drowsy or tend to speed or take more risks

because there are fewer cars on the road. This restriction was designed to prevent driving during these dangerous hours.

A first offense of one of these restrictions will result in a 60-day license suspension and a \$100 reinstatement fee.

Mobile Phone Usage by Operators Under 18

Operators under the age of 18 **cannot** use any mobile electronic device for any reason while operating a motor vehicle. The only exception is for reporting an emergency.

Violation Penalties:

- 1st offense - \$100 fine, 60-day license suspension, and a required attitudinal retraining course
- 2nd offense - \$250 fine, 180-day license suspension
- 3rd or subsequent offense - \$500 fine, one-year license suspension

Alcohol and Drugs

Brain science shows that the “judgment” area of the brain is not completely developed until our mid-20s. Therefore, teens are more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol and other drugs, greatly impairing their ability to drive. Impaired driving can:

- Slow your reflexes
- Distort your vision and judgment
- Increase your reaction time
- Make you feel more confident and take chances you normally wouldn't

Teens must stay sober to drive safely. Talk to your teen about the danger of drinking and driving. Chances are they have already either tried or been tempted to try alcohol.

Teen Fatalities

Automobile crashes are the leading cause of death of teenagers.

In 2007 and 2008, 16 and 17 year-old drivers in Massachusetts were responsible for 23 teen deaths, including their own.

There is a message in these numbers: **Don't let your teen become one of these statistics.**

The Cost of Speeding

Speed kills. Few of the young drivers in a crash **ever thought it could happen to them.** Make your Junior Operator understand, in the strongest terms possible, that speeding and other forms of reckless driving can and often do result in serious, even deadly, consequences.

Let's face it – there is also a monetary incentive to obey the law. If your Junior Operator is convicted of a first speeding offense, he or she will face a 90-day license suspension, plus:

- \$50 fine
- \$10 additional fine for each mile in excess of 10 miles per hour over the speed limit
- \$50 surcharge
- \$500 reinstatement fee
- \$75 fee for required attitudinal retraining course
- \$50 for retaking the written and road tests

Let's say your teen is caught driving 70 in a 55 mph zone. The financial penalties equal **\$775** for a first time speeding offense. That's money that would be better spent on college, car payments, the family rainy day fund, or anything other than the consequences of disobeying the law.

Seat Belts Save Lives

One of the biggest reasons so many teen drivers and their passengers don't survive crashes is their low seat belt usage. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), teenage drivers and passengers are among those least likely to wear their seat belts.

Parents, remind your teens to buckle up every time they get in a vehicle, whether they are drivers or passengers. Lead by example – buckle up every trip, every time – day and night.

Additional Resources

For more detailed information on the Junior Operator License Law or Safe Driving Law, or to download Young Driver – Parent/Guardian Contracts, sample driving logs, and other forms, please visit the RMV website at www.massrmv.com, and click on *Teens and Parents*. Here, you will also find an easy to read document titled “FAQs About Learner's Permits & Junior Operator Licenses.” You can also obtain a copy by calling the RMV at 857-368-8000.

All amendments to the Junior Operator License law are posted on the RMV website. Please check the website frequently for updates.