
INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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MANY TEENAGERS DON'T BUCKLE SAFETY BELTS — EVEN WHEN ADULTS DRIVING THEM ARE USING BELTS

ARLINGTON, VA — Belt use among high school students is lower than among other occupants in passenger vehicles. Even when adults are driving and using belts themselves, many teens riding with them aren't buckling up. This is a finding of a recent Insurance Institute for Highway Safety survey of teenage belt use.

When teenagers were being dropped off at school in the morning by adults, nearly half (46 percent) weren't using safety belts. Half the time the unbelted teens were riding with an adult who was buckled up. Only 8 percent of the time was the opposite true — teens were buckled up in vehicles in which the adult drivers weren't using belts.

The survey was conducted at 12 high schools in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Researchers observed teenagers in the morning going to school and in the evening just before a football game. The observations focused on four groups — teenage drivers, teen passengers in vehicles with teen drivers, teen passengers with adult drivers (presumed to be the teens' parents in most cases), and the adult drivers.

Recreational settings like football games could be expected to correspond with lower belt use. But that generally wasn't the case. The survey found that male teenage drivers were the only group whose belt use rates were lower at the football games than when arriving at school in the morning. Allan Williams, Institute chief scientist and author of the study, says "it's still possible that teenagers' belt use might drop off more in other recreational settings, especially social settings where parties and alcohol might be involved."

Among teenagers observed in both settings, arriving at school and going to a game, about a third were inconsistent about using safety belts. Some teenagers who used

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**PERCENT SAFETY BELT USE WHEN ARRIVING AT
HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE MORNING**

	Percent belt use	
	Males	Females
Adult driver	63	71
Teenage passenger with adult driver	50	56
Teenage driver	54	70
Teenage passenger with teen driver	42	52

**DISTRIBUTION OF BELT USE IN CARS WITH
ADULT DRIVERS AND TEEN PASSENGERS,
ARRIVING AT SCHOOL IN THE MORNING**

Both adult and teenager using belts	46%
Neither adult nor teenager using belt	23%
Adult using belt, teenager unbelted	23%
Teenager using belt, adult unbelted	8%

belts on the way to school weren't using them at the football game, and the reverse also was true.

Belt use was lower among male teen drivers compared with adult males, while the differences among adult and teen female drivers were negligible. But belt use tended to be even lower among teen passengers, both male and female. In the morning going to school, only 50 percent of male teens and 56 percent of female teens riding with adult drivers were using their belts. When another teenager was driving, teen passenger belt use fell to 42 percent among the males and 52 percent among females. However, teen passengers were much more likely to be using belts when the driver, whether an adult or another teenager, was buckled up.

Adding belt use provisions to graduated licensing systems might help increase teenagers' buckle up rates. North Carolina's graduated licensing law, for example, calls for a fine of up to \$100 for belt violations, compared with \$25 for older drivers who aren't using belts. Violations also can delay a young person's graduation to full driving privileges.

"If states publicize and enforce such penalties, it could make a difference," Williams says. "Parents also need to do more to get their teens to use their safety belts. It's remarkable that so many parents who make the effort to protect themselves by buckling up aren't insisting that their sons and daughters do the same."

**End 2-page release on teenagers' safety belt use
Internet: www.highwaysafety.org**