



# Young Drivers Report the Highest Level of Phone Involvement in Crash or Near-Crash Incidences

In the first nationally representative telephone survey on distracted driving, NHTSA reported attitudes and behaviors of 6,000 drivers 18 and older from all 50 States and the District of Columbia about distracted driving. This research note extracts information from the December 2011 survey about cell phone use and distracted driving for young drivers. A person was considered a driver if he or she had driven in the past year. The survey used a random-digit-dialing procedure to select one eligible driver within each eligible household and oversampled people 18 to 34 on both landlines and cell phones. The full report contains a description of the survey methodology.

## Young Drivers Report More Crashes While Using Cell Phones

Overall, 6% of respondents reported having been in a crash in the past year; 7% were in a near-crash; and the majority (86%) reported no crash. Men have slightly more crash or near-crash incidences than women (15% versus 12%, respectively). Young drivers 18 to 20 have the highest incidence of crash or near-crash experience (23%) compared to all other age groups, and drivers 65 and older have the lowest (8%). Young drivers report almost twice as many crashes (17%) as the next highest group, those 21- to 24-year-olds (9%), and up to four times as many crashes as the other age groups (4%–6%). Figure 1 shows the crash and near-crash experience by sex and age.

Most drivers in the survey had not been in a crash or near-crash, but of the 718 drivers who were (males 14.9%, females 12.4%), 6% report that they were using a phone at the time: 4% were talking, 1% were sending a text message or e-mail, and 1% were reading a text message or e-mail. Women report slightly higher phone involvement than men in crashes and near-

crashes (7% versus 5%, respectively). Young drivers 18 to 20 report the highest level of phone involvement (13%) at the time of a crash or near-crash; 8% said they were sending a text or e-mail, 3% were reading a text or e-mail, and 2% said they were talking on a cell phone. Drivers 25 to 34 reported talking on the phone at the time of the crash or near crash (10%) more than any other age group.

## Most Drivers Report That Using a Cell Phone While Driving Makes No Difference on Their Driving but Texting or E-mailing Does

When asked how their driving is different when talking on the phone, at least half of all drivers report that talking on a phone makes *no difference* on their driving performance, and this increases to 60% of drivers under age 35 thinking it makes *no difference*. Two out of 10 drivers say they *drive slower*. Table 1 shows the percentages.

When asked about the impact of sending text messages or e-mails while driving, however, 25% of all drivers said it makes *no difference*. About 20% of young drivers 18 to 20 years old thought sending text messages or e-mails made no difference on their driving, compared to 27%–29% for drivers 21 to 34. More drivers reported that they *drive slower*, with about one-third of males and one-quarter of females reporting this. Young drivers 18 to 20 were more likely to say that they *drive slower* as a consequence of texting or e-mailing than older drivers (37% versus 26%–30%).

Few drivers recognize that they sometimes *drift out of the lane* while talking on a phone (virtually none) or texting (2%) while driving. Younger drivers under 25 were more likely to report that they drift out of the lane or roadway (9% to 15%) when texting than older drivers (3% to 5%). Table 2 shows the percentages.

Figure 1  
**Crash or Near-Crash Involvement as a Driver In the Past Year, by Sex and Age, Percent**

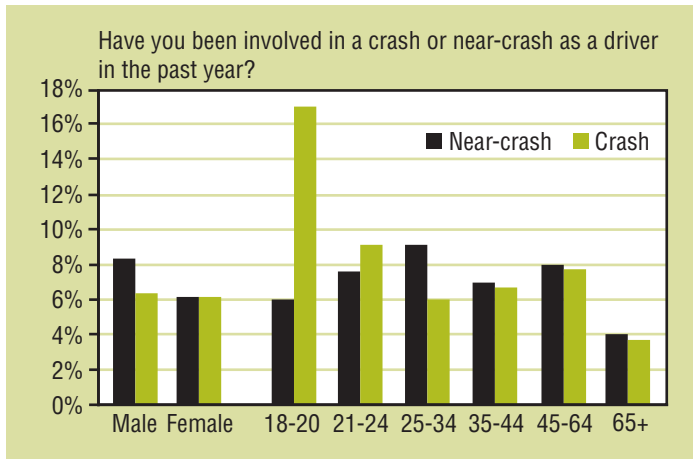


Figure 2  
**Cell Phone Use at the Time of the Last Crash or Near-Crash, by Sex and Age, Percentage**

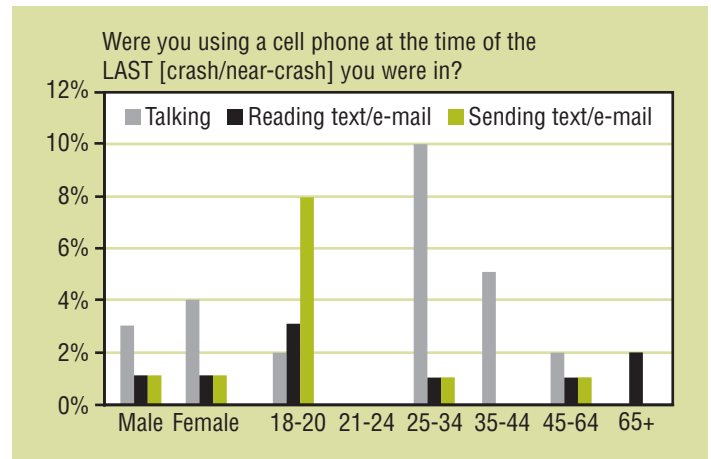


Figure 1 data

Data Table (Percentage)								
	Sex		Age Group					
	Male	Female	18-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65+
Near-crash	8.4	6.2	5.9	7.5	9.2	7.0	7.9	4.0
Crash	6.5	6.2	17.0	9.2	6.0	6.6	5.7	3.8
No crash	85.1	87.6	77.1	83.2	84.8	86.4	86.5	92.2
(N)	(2,854)	(2,975)	(271)	(346)	(1,087)	(773)	(2,490)	(745)

Figure 2 data

Data Table (Percentage)								
	Sex		Age Group					
	Male	Female	18-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65+
Yes, talking	3.2	4.4	1.6	0.0	9.9	5.4	2.0	0.0
Yes, reading a text/e-mail message	0.8	1.2	3.3	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.7	2.2
Yes, sending a text/e-mail message	1.1	1.2	8.2	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.7	0.0
No	95.0	93.3	86.9	100.0	88.2	94.6	96.7	97.8
(N)	(377)	(341)	(61)	(48)	(161)	(92)	(302)	(46)

Table 1

**How Talking on a Phone Affects Driving, by Sex and Age, Percentage (Multiple Responses)**

Effects	Sex		Age Group					
	Male	Female	18–20	21–24	25–34	35–44	45–64	65+
No difference	55.1	52.4	60.8	63.0	57.3	51.9	50.5	50.9
Drive slower	19.3	21.3	14.4	14.8	23.1	20.1	21.0	17.2
Drive faster	0.6	1.5	1.9	3.1	2.7	0.5	0.1	0.4
Change lanes less frequently	1.4	1.6	4.3	0.8	1.4	2.4	1.1	0.9
Drift out of lane/roadway	1.3	0.2	0.0	2.3	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.4
(N)	(1,896)	(1,919)	(209)	(257)	(873)	(593)	(1,596)	(233)

Table 2

**How Texting/E-Mailing Affects Driving, by Sex and Age, Percentage (Multiple Responses)**

Effects	Sex		Age Group					
	Male	Female	18–20	21–24	25–34	35–44	45–64	65+*
No difference	24.2	25.8	19.6	27.0	29.5	19.6	24.1	n/a
Drive slower	36.4	25.3	37.1	30.2	26.9	31.3	34.6	n/a
Drift out of lane/roadway	8.2	5.8	9.3	15.1	5.3	2.7	4.4	n/a
Change lanes more frequently	2.4	2.1	7.2	0.8	2.6	0.9	0.0	n/a
(N)	(376)	(329)	(97)	(126)	(227)	(112)	(136)	*

\*sample is too small for respondents 65 and older.

## Young Drivers Send More Text Messages or E-mails While Driving

When asked about sending text messages or e-mails while driving, 18% of drivers reported ever doing so, and males and females showed a similar incidence (19% males, 17% females). Figure 3 shows that drivers under 24 are much more likely to text while driving (44% to 49%) than older drivers. In fact, after age 25, the incidence of texting while driving drops with every age group, from 26% in the 25- to 34-year-olds to less than 1% in those 65 and older.

Figure 4 shows that among those who do text while driving, the majority of drivers of all ages *continue to drive* while texting. The highest rate of *continue to drive* is seen in the youngest group with 73% of those 18 to 20 continuing to drive while they text compared to 62% to 68% for other age groups. Drivers under 25 are less likely to *pull over then send* (6% to 9%) than those 25 and

older (range 7% to 21%). Drivers 21 to 24 are slightly more likely to hand the phone to a passenger (17% compared to 9%–14%). Few drivers of any age use a voice command. The sample size was too small for drivers 65 and older.

Figure 3

### Percentage Sending Text Messages or E-Mails While Driving, by Sex and Age (Percentage Ever)

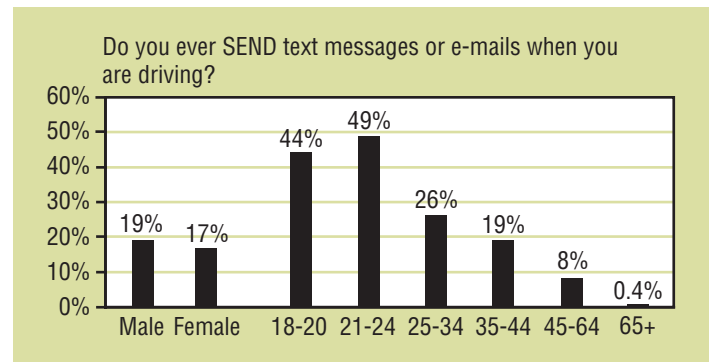
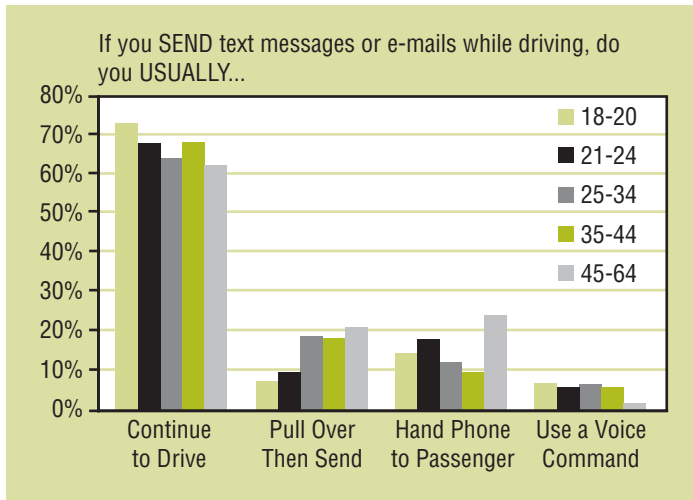


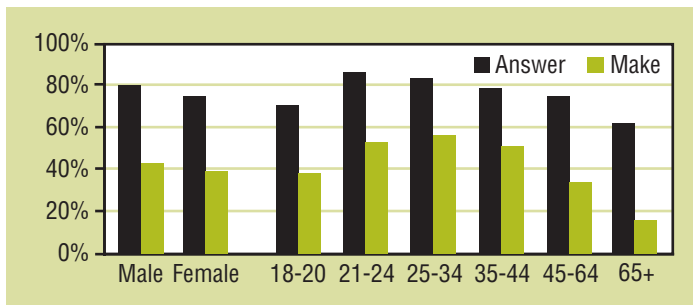
Figure 4  
**Usual Manner of Sending Text Messages or E-mails While Driving, by Sex and Age, Percent**



**Drivers Continue to Drive While Using Their Cell Phones**

Most drivers answer incoming calls and continue to drive. About two-thirds of young drivers 18 to 20 (68%) answer and continue to drive, slightly higher than the 45-to 64-year-old drivers (60%) or 65+ drivers (44%), and lower than the 25- to 34-year-old drivers (78%) in 2010. At least one-third of all drivers hold the phones in their hands while they answer the incoming call, and this increases with each age group, reaching 62% for the oldest drivers. Another one-third of young drivers use cell phone speakers when they answer and drive, and this gradually decreases with each age group, down to 8% for the oldest drivers. About 20% of all drivers use hands-free earpieces, and up to 10% of the oldest drivers have built-in car systems.

Figure 5  
**Percentage of Respondents Answering and Making Calls While Driving by Sex and Age (all, most, or some driving trips)**



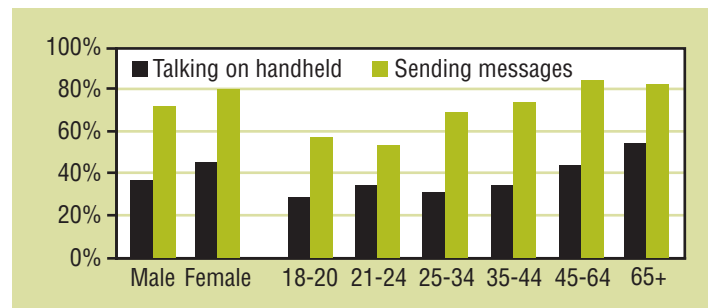
**Young Drivers Less Likely to Say Something to a Driver Who Is Using a Cell Phone**

When asked as passengers how they would feel about different situations, almost all respondents (about 90% overall) reported that they considered a driver who was *sending text messages or e-mails or reading e-mails or text messages as very unsafe*. Only about two-thirds of young drivers 18 to 20, felt *very unsafe* if their drivers were sending messages, and this steadily increased in each age group, reaching 98% in the oldest group.

Less than half (40%) of all respondents were likely to say something if the driver was talking on a hand-held cell phone while driving and this almost doubles (76%) for a driver sending an e-mail or text message. Young drivers were less likely than older drivers to speak up. About one-third of young drivers 18 to 20 and 21 to 24 would say something to the driver who was talking on a handheld, whereas about half of drivers 65+ would speak up.

More young drivers would say something to a driver who was sending a text message or e-mail while driving and this steadily increases with age, starting with about half of those under 25 (56%, 52%) and increasing to 80% for drivers 45 and older (see Figure 6).

Figure 6  
**As a Passenger, How Likely Are You to Say Something if Your Driver Is \_\_\_\_\_, by Sex and Age (Percentage Very Likely)**



## Summary

About two-thirds (68%) of young drivers 18 to 20 are willing to answer incoming phone calls on some, most, or all driving trips, and most continue to drive, at slightly higher rates than older drivers.

Young drivers 18 to 20 have the highest incidence of self-reported crash or near-crash experiences compared to all other age groups and the highest incidence of phone involvement at the time of the crash or near-crash.

Like older drivers, most young drivers do not think that talking on a phone while driving affects their driving performance. When it comes to texting while driving, only about 1 out of 5 young drivers think that texting makes no difference to their driving performance. Young drivers under 25 were more aware than older age groups that they drift out of the lane or roadway and were more likely to report that they drive slower when texting.

Drivers under 25 are much more likely to text while driving than all other age groups, and the incidence of texting while driving drops with every age group to less than 1% for those 65 and older. For those who text while driving, most continue to drive. Young drivers are less likely to pull over then send their messages than older age groups, but sometimes hand the phone to a passenger. Young drivers are less likely to say something to a driver who is sending a text message while driving than older age groups.

## Links to Full Report and Traffic Tech

Tison, J., Chaudhary, N., & Cosgrove, L. (2011, December). *National phone survey on distracted driving attitudes and behaviors*. (DOT HS 811 555). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Available at [www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811555.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811555.pdf). The two-page Traffic Tech summary is available at [www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/traffic\\_tech/tt407.pdf](http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/traffic_tech/tt407.pdf).



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration**

This research note and other general information on highway traffic safety may be accessed by Internet users at: [www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/CATS/index.aspx](http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/CATS/index.aspx)