What is Graduated Driver License (GDL)?
GDL are laws that support a three-stage driver licensing system to phase in young beginners to full driving privileges. It helps teens hone their driving skills during the first year of licensure by reducing exposure to high-risk situations such as carrying teen passengers and driving at night. The three stages are: supervised learning (instruction permit) phase; intermediate (provisional license) phase that limits unsupervised driving in high risk situations; full licensure phase.

Why does GDL apply only to teens?
Minnesota teen drivers are overrepresented in traffic crashes due to inexperience, immaturity, distractions, night-time driving, speeding, and seat belt non use. Young drivers tend to overestimate their own driving abilities, and at the same time, underestimate the dangers on the road. Teens are more likely than older drivers to take risks such as speeding, and because they are inexperienced behind the wheel. Teens are much less able to cope with hazardous driving situations. In-vehicle distractions, especially teen passengers, can increase the risk of crash by distracting the driver and by creating peer pressure to take more risks behind the wheel.

What are Minnesota’s passenger limits for teen drivers?
For the first six months of licensure: Only one passenger under age 20 is permitted, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.
For the second six months of licensure: No more than three passengers under age 20 are permitted, unless accompanied by a parent or guardian.
Violating this law is a misdemeanor.
Exemption: Passengers under age 20 who are members of the driver’s immediate family are permitted.
Parents are encouraged to set stricter passenger limits for their newly licensed teen by not allowing any teen passengers for the first six-months of licensure, and no more than one for the second six-months.

Is there any exception for a teen who works as a nanny or babysitter for another family?
No, only passengers under age 20 who are members of the driver’s immediate family are exempt. All other passengers under age 20 are limited as described above.

What are Minnesota’s nighttime limits for teen drivers?
For the first six months of licensure: Driving is prohibited midnight – 5 a.m.
Exemptions: Driving when accompanied by a licensed driver age 25 or older; driving between home and place of employment; driving to/from home and a school event for which the school has not provided transportation; driving for employment purposes.
Violating this law is a misdemeanor.

More than half of all fatal crashes that occur at night and involve 16-year olds happen before midnight. Parents are encouraged to set stricter nighttime driving limits for their newly licensed teen beginning at 9 or 10 p.m.

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What about cell phone use or texting laws?
Drivers with an instruction permit or provisional license who are under age 18 may not use a cell phone, hand-held or hands-free, while driving. It’s illegal for all drivers to read/compose/send text messages and emails, or access the Internet while the vehicle is in motion or a part of traffic—including stopped in traffic or at a traffic light.

Has GDL reduced crashes?
Yes, a national study found a 30 percent lower rate of fatal crashes per population of 15 to 17 year olds, and a 20 percent reduction of insurance collision claim rates for 16 year old drivers, in states with good GDL laws.

How many hours does a teen need to practice during the instruction permit phase?
To qualify for a provisional license, a teen with a valid permit must drive under supervision of a licensed driver who is at least 21 years of age for not less than 30 hours. At least ten of the 30 hours must have taken place at night. Inexperience is a leading factor in teen crashes. Research shows that passing a driver’s test alone doesn’t mean that a young driver is “experienced.” To develop the skills and decision-making abilities to be a safe driver, many hours behind the wheel are needed. Every teen is unique in how long it takes to become an experienced driver. The goal is to be able to make good driving decisions in a wide variety of environments (highways, cities, rural roads) under a wide variety of conditions (weather and time of day). Handling the many challenges a driver will face are best learned with an experienced driver in the car, rather than when driving independently.

At what age can a teen get a permit?
To qualify for an instruction permit you must be at least 15 years old, complete 30 hours of classroom instruction and be enrolled in behind-the-wheel instruction, and pass a knowledge test.

At what age can a teen get a license?
To qualify for a provisional license you must be at least 16 years old, completed the classroom and behind-the-wheel phases of driver education, held an instruction permit for six months with no convictions for moving or alcohol/controlled-substance violations, driven under the supervision of a licensed driver who is at least 21 years of age for at least 30 hours, of which ten hours were at night, and pass a road test.

Can a teen get a restricted farm work license before age 16?
A 15 year old may qualify for a restricted farm work license after completing a driver education course and passing a road test. A restricted farm work license allows a young person to drive alone only to perform farm work for his or her parent during daylight hours, within 20 miles of the farmhouse, in cities with populations of less than 100,000. The applicant is not required to wait six-months before taking the road test for this license. The parent must fill out an affidavit, available at all driver license examination stations, and present a property tax statement and/or rental agreement.