

Parent Alert: New Deadly Threat

By Dr. Roger McIntire

Epidemic hits high schoolers! Death rate quadruples among 16-year-olds! No immunity in sight. Medical community has no shot that will help.

All your efforts to protect your teen from childhood diseases, accidents with sharp objects and running with scissors pale to almost nothing.

Is it a virus? A cancer? A new mind-splitting drug? No.
It's cars.

A study by Ezekiel Emanuel and David Wendler from the National Institutes of Health shows that daily hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and even deaths per million increase only slightly through childhood and early adolescence.

Before the driving age, football injuries top the list at 3,800 injuries per million occasions of participation. Soccer is next at 2,400, then basketball at 1,900, cheerleading at 1,700, baseball at 1,400 and skateboarding at 800. All of these injuries become less frequent as the kids grow up. Of course the number and age of players varies in these sports.

But until they reach the 15- to 19-age group, the daily death rate among children is almost steady at about 1 per million per day. For teenagers, the statistics increase dramatically. From early to late teens, emergency room visits jump from 30 to 60 per million per day. For older teens, deaths skyrocket to 10 per million per day.

All that we do to protect our kids by using car seats and seat belts, lecturing about looking both ways and following the rules at the neighborhood pool—all is overwhelmed and swept aside by the shocking statistics of driving and riding with reckless friends.

May through August is the most dangerous time. We would expect that this one-third of the year would produce 33 percent of the accidents but 42 percent occur during the summer. The National Safe Kids Campaign's study of data from 1991 to 1996 concludes that summer is more dangerous because "kids are not sitting at their desks in school in a protected environment, the days are much longer . . . the exposure (to risk) is more."

The girls are now almost as much at risk as the boys. In 1990, 160 of every 1000 girls wrecked their cars that year and by 2000 the number was 175. The boys are steady at 210 per 1000 per year.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reports that girls drink just as much as boys—48 percent of girls drink; 52 percent of boys. In 2000, high school freshmen girls nudged out the boys for first place in reports of regular drinking—41 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys.

Saying, "Be careful" is not enough. Limitations and restrictions need to be enforced. Join a parent team that will be checking every car that leaves the prom dance. Better yet, help your teens plan the whole evening with chauffeuring and no need for cars. Nothing else you have ever done to protect them during all their growing up years means as much as your riding and driving rules.

You don't want that terrible late-night phone call, "This is Officer Smith of the West Virginia State Police, Your son (daughter) has been . . ."

Dr. McIntire is the author of [Teenagers and Parents: 10 Steps to a Better Relationship and Raising Good Kids in Tough Times](#). Write him through the Journal, check out www.ParentSuccess.com, or write his blog, at Rogermcintire.wordpress.com.