



# NTSB

# SAFETY ALERT

National Transportation Safety Board

## Drowsy Driving Among Young Drivers

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***Get the right amount of sleep to stay alert behind the wheel***

### ***The problem***

- According to research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, one in five fatal crashes involves a drowsy driver, and drivers aged 16 to 24 are at the greatest risk for being involved in a drowsy driving crash.
- Between 2010 and 2015, more than 1,300 drivers aged 25 and younger were involved in fatal drowsy driving crashes in the United States, representing over 30 percent of all drivers in such crashes. Studies conducted in North Carolina and New York found that drivers aged 25 and younger are over-represented in all (fatal and nonfatal) drowsy driving crashes.
- Survey research has found that young adults aged 19 to 24 are more likely to report falling asleep while driving than any other age group.
- Teens need 8 to 10 hours of sleep per night, yet a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that more than two-thirds of high school students get 7 hours of sleep or less on an average school night.
- High school students who reported sleeping 7 or fewer hours per night were more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors such as texting while driving, drinking and driving, and not wearing a seat belt.

### ***Related crash***

On Sunday, March 20, 2016, about 1:57 p.m., a 2013 Hyundai Elantra passenger car occupied by an 18-year-old driver and three passengers, ranging in age from 17 to 19, was traveling northbound in the left lane of US Highway 77 (US-77) in Robstown, Texas. The Hyundai drifted left toward the center median and entered the edge of the median at a location on US-77 that included a left-turn lane. Upon entering the median, the driver attempted to steer the vehicle back into the northbound lanes but ultimately lost control of the vehicle. The Hyundai crossed the center median and entered the southbound traffic lanes, where it collided with a 2009 Freightliner truck-tractor in combination with a flatbed semitrailer. As a result of the crash, the driver of the Hyundai was seriously injured, and the three passengers died.

The group of teens in the Hyundai had been returning to Houston, Texas, from a weekend trip to South Padre Island, Texas. There was no evidence that the driver was impaired by drugs or alcohol.

The driver's cell phone had a navigation application running. Her phone records indicated that, immediately before the crash, she did not send or receive a text message or engage in a cell phone conversation. Based on interviews and cell phone records, investigators determined that in the 24 hours before the crash, the driver had a relatively short window of opportunity for sleep, between approximately 5:17 a.m. and 10:10 a.m. on the morning of the crash. Additionally, the crash occurred at a time of day when individuals commonly experience a dip in alertness and performance. The NTSB determined that the probable cause of the Robstown, Texas, crash was the loss of control by the driver of the Hyundai, due to inattention resulting from fatigue. (NTSB Investigation No. HWY16FH007)

### ***What can young drivers do?***

- Make sleep a priority. While older adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night, teens need more—8 to 10 hours for optimal health and safety.
- Avoid driving during nighttime and early morning hours, when sleep typically occurs. Almost every state has graduated driver license laws that limit when teens can drive after dark. Such laws have been shown to reduce the rates of serious crashes among young drivers.

### ***What can parents do?***

- Help teens create a good environment for sleep. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends keeping electronic devices such as TVs, video games, computers, and cell phones out of teens' bedrooms. Research shows that doing so leads to longer sleep times.
- Advocate for later school start times. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that middle and high schools delay the start of classes to 8:30 a.m. or later. Earlier school start times are associated with higher risk of teen crashes.
- Teach new drivers that drowsy driving can be as risky as driving drunk, drugged, or distracted.
- Plan ahead to ensure that teens have a safe ride to and from late night and early morning events.

### ***Interested in more information?***

The Robstown, Texas, crash report is available under report number HAB1609 at the web page for [NTSB accident investigations](#).

The CDC report *Sleep Duration and Injury-Related Risk Behaviors Among High School Students – United States, 2007–2013*, is located at the following link: [CDC sleep duration and risk report](#).

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine *#SleepRechargesYou* website provides healthy sleep tips for teens: [Sleep tips for teens from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#).

The American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement on *School Start Times for Adolescents* provides useful information: [American Academy of Pediatrics school start times policy](#).

The Governors Highway Safety Association report *Wake Up Call! Understanding Drowsy Driving and What States Can Do* provides information on drowsy driving and how states and others can best address it: [GHSA drowsy driving resource](#).

This NTSB safety alert and others can be accessed from the web page for [NTSB safety alerts](#).