

## **Why is Driver's Education Important**

Your child only learns how to drive once in their life and will use that skill every day for the rest of their life. Students learn how a vehicle operates, how to drive on a freeway, navigate busy urban streets, and safely drive night or day in all kinds of weather. Learning to drive teaches safety on the road and reduces the risk of accidents. Our communities are safer for us knowing traffic laws. Driver education can benefit people of all ages but is essential for inexperienced drivers.

## **When Is the Best Time to Learn How to Drive?**

[According to Anne Marie Hayes, a certified driving instructor and author of 3 Keys to Keeping Your Teen Alive: Lessons for Surviving the First Year of Driving](#), 16 years old is the best age to learn to drive. The human brain does not mature until age 25, and by then, patterns of learning and resulting habits are formed. A recent discussion argues that due to increased maturity and life experience, being 18 years old might be a better place to start. However, Anne Marie Hayes states that through research, 16 or 17 is the better age. [According to Forbes Magazine](#), teen drivers who received their licenses before age 18 and participated in mandatory driver education, behind-the-wheel training and graduated driver licensing restrictions were better prepared and less likely to crash than 18-year-old drivers who did not undergo the same standardized preparation.

In addition, parents are the biggest influence on teens who are learning to drive through coaching, monitoring, supporting, and helping them practice. Students 18 years and older are often ready to leave home, whether it is to go off to college or move out into their own apartments thus have less available support in their endeavor to obtain their driver's license.

## **What does Washington State law say?**

Currently, driver's education is only mandatory for 16- and 17-year-olds in Washington state, but there have been growing concerns over a lack of education for students over 18. Data from the [State Traffic Safety Commission](#) has shown more drivers between the ages of 18 and 25 have been involved in fatal accidents than any other age group within the past decade, creating concern from lawmakers over the lack of education for young drivers.

[Per Washington State Department of Licensing](#), some students delay licensure until they are 18 or older, thus skipping the mandatory driver's education. Those who do not complete driver training have higher crash involvement rates. For example, drivers ages 18-20 who have not had driver training have an 80% higher rate of involvement in injury and fatal crashes compared to those who completed driver training prior to licensure, and drivers ages 21-24 without driver training have a 70% higher rate of involvement in injury and fatal crashes compared to those that completed driver training prior to licensure.

Statistics clearly support the importance of taking driver's education from certified instructors. While it is an investment of time and money for each new driver, lessons learned for safe navigation of a vehicle last a lifetime, teach students responsibility, and assist them in taking steps towards independence and adulthood.

Waiting until age 18 to get a driver's license allows students to avoid the cost and time commitment of mandatory driver's education. They do not realize the risk they are trading to save money. Just because you can skip it does not mean it is safe to do so. Driver's education creates a safer environment for the entire community.

### **What is the proposed law in Washington State concerning Drivers Education?**

In 2024, Governor Jay Inslee signed SB 5583 into law, which requires the Department of Licensing to expand the requirement of mandatory driver's education for young drivers aged 18-24. This law is expected to take effect by 2026.

To date, driver's education, both classroom and behind the wheel, is completed by instructors certified by the state of Washington. If this law takes effect, the DOL has stated its intention to advertise and teach driver education through its website. This will be at taxpayers' expense. In addition to driving up taxes on the public, this will create competition with the driving schools the DOL currently regulates, effectively undercutting the private sector.

### **Recap**

A child's safety is in danger when they obtain a driver's license without obtaining driver's training from a certified instructor. The statistics from Washington State DOL that find accident and death rates climbing in young drivers aged 18-24 is alarming. Certified schools are small businesses that support our communities. It would benefit everyone and keep our taxes from increasing if we worked together for the safe licensing of our students.