

Victoria's Graduated Licensing System Is it saving lives?

Ten years ago, VicRoads introduced Victoria's new Graduated Licensing System (GLS). The changes were designed to improve the safety of young drivers. They represented the most far-reaching and important changes to Victoria's driver licensing system since the introduction of learner permits in 1974.

With more than half a million drivers having now graduated through the system, the GLS has been evaluated and results have shown that those decisions of 10 years ago have helped to save many young lives.

The problem

Victoria has seen significant reductions in road trauma over the years, but young drivers continue to have more crashes resulting in death and serious injury than any other group of drivers on the road. Each year about 90 people are killed and 1,800 are seriously injured in crashes involving 18 to 25 year old drivers. Road crashes are one of the leading causes of death among young people.

Victoria's Graduated Licensing System

Figure 1 shows that as drivers we have the highest risk of crashing during the first year after we get our licence. The risk slowly decreases for many years after that.

Extensive national and international research, along with analysis of crash trends, helped identify that these young driver crashes were most commonly caused by inexperience, young age, driving in high-risk situations (e.g. driving late at night or with multiple passengers) and undertaking unsafe behaviours (e.g. speeding, drink or drug-driving and being distracted).

Research and consultation with international experts led to major improvements to Victoria's GLS. Key changes included:

- compulsory minimum of 120 hours of logged supervised learner driving practice
- a minimum 12 month learner permit period
- a more challenging on-road driving test
- a two-stage probationary licence: P1 (minimum one year) and P2 (minimum three years)
- a peer passenger restriction¹ for P1 drivers
- probationary drivers banned from driving certain high powered vehicles
- a ban on mobile phone use for P1 probationary drivers (extended to P2 drivers in 2013).

These and other changes were introduced progressively between 1 January 2007 and 1 July 2008. The changes came with strong community support, after Victoria's road safety agencies had spent more than ten years promoting safer driving for young people, including learners getting minimum 120 hours of supervised practice.

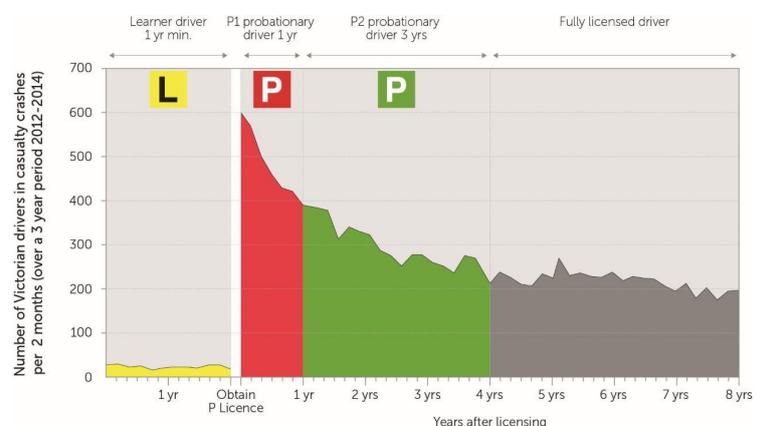


Figure 1. Crash risk for Victorian drivers

The results

The question many are asking is whether the GLS has improved driver behaviour and, most importantly, young driver safety?

The answer is: YES. According to the results of a recent evaluation, the GLS has been effective in reducing crashes among young drivers.

The evaluation primarily measured whether the GLS reduced the rate at which young novice drivers were involved in crashes. It also examined whether changes in the behaviour of young drivers contributed to any crash reductions. To do this, researchers looked at a range of factors, which were measured before and after the introduction of the GLS, including the:

- number and rate of crashes involving young drivers
- number and rate of traffic offences committed by young drivers
- amount of supervised driving experience completed by learners before getting a licence
- behaviour of probationary drivers, e.g. drink-driving, speeding, carrying peer passengers and using mobile phones.

Key evaluation results showed:

- 42.5% fewer drivers aged 18–23 years have been involved in fatal or serious injury crashes since the GLS was introduced. By comparison, there has only been a 29% reduction among older, more experienced drivers since that time.
- For drivers aged 18–20 years, there has been a 20.3% reduction in their rate of involvement in fatal and serious injury crashes, and a 13.6% reduction for all injury crashes. These reductions are statistically significant.
- For drivers aged 21–23 years there was no significant change in their crash rates.
- There has been a 19.4% reduction in fatal and serious injury crash involvement rates among drivers aged 18–23 years in their first year of driving, the group with the highest crash risk (Figure 1). This decrease is statistically significant.

- The peer passenger restriction on P1 licence holders (P-platers in their first year) was particularly effective. For P1 drivers carrying more than one peer passenger, there was a 69.2% decrease in their rate of involvement in fatal and serious injury crashes and a 69.8% corresponding reduction in injury crashes. These reductions are statistically significant.
- Learner drivers are spending more time on their L plates giving them more opportunity to get valuable practice. Sixty per cent of 18–20 year olds have held a learner permit for at least 24 months compared with 37% before the GLS.

The evaluation showed that the GLS initiatives introduced in 2007 and 2008, supported by promotional activities and support programs, have been very effective in improving the safety of inexperienced drivers aged 18–20 years and those aged 18–23 years in their first year of holding a licence. It also shows that future improvements to the GLS can be made by focusing on the safety of older novice drivers.

For drivers aged 18–20 years, there has been a 20.3% reduction in their rate of involvement in fatal and serious injury crashes

More information

For more information about Victoria's GLS visit our website: vicroads.vic.gov.au

¹ Drivers are not allowed to carry more than one passenger aged 16-21 years. Spouses and siblings are exempt.