



For Release on Monday, Aug. 8, 2011...6 pp.

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Young N.J. drivers engage in risky behavior

New Jersey's least experienced drivers are engaging in increasingly risky behavior behind the wheel. The troubling revelation comes in a recent study by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind, co-sponsored by the state's Division of Highway Traffic Safety.

The overall percentage of New Jersey drivers who report having sent a text message while driving has flattened out at 1 in 4 (25%). However, the study finds that among drivers under age 30, those who admit to texting while driving increased 8 points from a year ago (64% vs. 56%). The sobering fact is that younger drivers are more than twice as likely (17%) as any other age group to say they send texts "very often" while driving.

Similarly, while overall use of hand-held cellphones while driving (39%) has not increased over the past year, the percentage of drivers under the age of 30 saying they "very often" or "sometimes" use their hand-held cellphones while driving increased 10 percentage points (to 23% from 13%). "Most drivers seem to have gotten the message that driving while talking or texting is a bad idea," said Dan Cassino, the principal investigator, "but that doesn't make the roads much safer if the least experienced drivers are more likely to be paying attention to something other than the road."

There was also a decrease in the percentage of drivers under the age of 30 who report always wearing their seat belts when driving (83%), down 8 points from last year (91%). This decrease re-establishes the youngest age group as the least likely to buckle up when driving, after they had achieved parity in the measure last year.

Drivers under 30 are also less likely than others to use their seat belt when they are passengers. They are 11 points less likely than others to say that they always buckle up in the front passenger seat (79%) and 11 points less likely to say that they do so while in the back seat (40%). This too is down significantly from the 2010 figures (87% and 57%, respectively). "It is troubling that our youngest, most inexperienced drivers are the least likely to wear seat belts," said Gary Poedubicky, acting director of New Jersey's Division of Highway Traffic Safety. "For inexperienced drivers not to buckle up is a potentially deadly combination."

One in 4 New Jersey drivers (26%) say they drive over 65 miles per hour on state highways "most of the time," with another 1 in 4 (25%) saying that they do so "often." One in 4 (25%) also say that they drive over 70 "most of the time" or "often." Again, younger drivers cause concern: 64% say they regularly speed on highways, up from 56% a year ago. In addition, a third of drivers (34%) between 17 and 29 say they regularly go over 70 miles per hour on the highway, while only 22% of those aged 45-59 and 16% aged 60 and over say they do so.

About 1 in 5 New Jersey drivers (18%) admit to having consumed alcohol before driving, unchanged from last year's figure. Once again, though, young drivers are

significantly more likely than other age groups to say that they had driven after drinking, with 24% saying that they had done so, up 9 points from last year.

“Alcohol is a factor in 25% of our fatal crashes in New Jersey,” Poedubicky said. “A key reason for this is the mistaken belief on the part of people that they are OK to drive after having a few drinks.”

The number of drivers who have been involved in a crash has remained unchanged since 2008. About 1 in 6 drivers (16 percent) say they have been in a collision in the past three years. However, the figures include a significant increase in the proportion of drivers under 30 who say they have been in a collision: 28%, up from 21% last year.

One reassuring note may be that younger drivers may recognize their driving flaws, as they are significantly less likely (53%) than all other age groups to say they are “above average” drivers. “It’s good that younger drivers recognize that they’re not as good as others on the road,” said Cassino, “but it doesn’t seem to be leading them to drive any more carefully.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University survey was co-sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety and carried out by telephone from April 14, 2011, to May 17, 2011, using a randomly selected sample of 1,002 New Jersey residents aged 17 and over who report they drive regularly, including an oversample of drivers under the age of 30. It has a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points.

**Tables, questions, and methodology available on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actuality line: (201) 692-2846. For more information, please call (973) 443-8756.**

Background Memo and Tables

This study was conducted by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind and co-sponsored by the New Jersey Division of Highway Traffic Safety. The survey was conducted by telephone from April 14 through May 17, using a randomly selected sample of 1,002 New Jersey residents aged 17 and over who report they drive regularly, including an oversample of drivers under the age of 30. The sampling error for 1,002 randomly selected respondents in a statewide survey is +/-3 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cellphone-only-households, interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender among the voting population.

In the past three years have you personally sent a text message while driving?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Yes	25%	25	21	25	25	64	35	15
No	75%	75	79	75	75	36	65	85

	17-29			30-44			45-59			60+		
	2011	2010	2009	2011	2010	2009	2011	2010	2009	2011	2010	2009
Yes	64%	56	57	35	37	28	15	17	12	2	1	1
No	36%	43	43	65	63	72	85	83	87	98	98	99

How often do you personally drive your car and send text messages on your phone?
(ASKED OF THOSE WHO HAVE SENT A TEXT)

	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Very Often	11%	19	3	17	8	2	0
Sometimes	20%	15	24	22	17	22	0
Rarely	63%	63	62	57	64	72	85
Never	7%	3	10	4	11	3	15

Now let me ask about driving and cell phones. How often do you personally drive your car and talk on a hand-held cell-phone?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Very Often	4%	3	4	5	7	5	4	2
Sometimes	10%	9	10	9	16	12	10	5
Rarely	25%	26	29	21	26	33	25	15
Never	60%	61	56	64	51	50	56	76
Don't Have a Cell	1%	0	2	1	0	0	2	3

	17-29		30-44		45-59		60+	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Very Often	7%	4	5	4	4	3	2	1
Sometimes	16%	9	12	14	10	9	5	5
Rarely	26%	41	33	24	25	28	15	18
Never	51%	47	50	56	56	59	76	74
Don't Have a Cell	0%	0	0	1	2	1	3	3

When you're the driver, how often do you wear your seatbelt?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Always	90%	92	85	94	83	91	93	89
Most of the Time	6%	5	9	3	9	6	5	6
Just Sometimes	3%	3	4	2	6	2	1	3
Never	2%	1	2	1	3	1	1	2

	17-29		30-44		45-59		60+	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Always	83%	91	91	92	93	90	89	94
Most of the Time	9%	5	6	4	5	6	6	4
Just Sometimes	6%	4	2	4	1	2	3	1
Never	3%	0	1	0	1	2	2	1

When you're the front seat passenger, how often do you wear your seatbelt?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Always	88	89	85	91	79	92	90	90
Most of the Time	6	6	6	5	10	4	5	4
Just Sometimes	3	3	5	1	8	2	3	2
Never	2	1	3	1	4	2	1	2
Never a Front Seat Passenger	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1

	17-29		30-44		45-59		60+	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Always	79%	87	92	89	90	88	90	90
Most of the Time	10%	7	4	1	5	4	4	5
Just Sometimes	8%	5	2	8	3	5	2	3
Never	4%	1	2	2	1	3	2	1
Never a Front Seat Passenger	0%	0	0	1	1	1	1	1

When you're a passenger in the back seat, how often do you wear your seatbelt?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Always	51%	53	49	54	40	51	55	56
Most of the Time	9%	11	10	9	9	7	14	8
Just Sometimes	14%	13	16	12	20	15	12	10
Never	17%	14	16	18	29	21	11	12
Never a Back Seat Passenger	8%	7	9	7	2	6	8	14

	17-29		30-44		45-59		60+	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Always	40%	57	51	49	55	56	56	52
Most of the Time	9%	6	7	14	14	14	8	9
Just Sometimes	20%	15	15	15	12	9	10	15
Never	29%	20	21	16	11	12	12	12
Never a Back Seat Passenger	2%	2	6	6	8	9	14	12

When you're driving on a New Jersey highway, how often would you say you drive over 65 miles an hour...?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Most of the Time	26%	26	31	21	30	33	23	21
Often	25%	19	26	23	34	30	22	16
Just Once in a While	34%	40	30	39	29	30	37	38
Never	14%	13	13	16	7	7	17	23
Don't Know	1%	2	1	1	0	0	1	2

	17-29		30-44		45-59		60+	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Most of the Time	30%	35	33	28	23	25	21	20
Often	34%	21	30	22	22	21	16	14
Just Once in a While	29%	36	30	34	37	41	38	49
Never	7%	7	7	14	17	13	23	16
Don't Know	0%	1	0	2	1	0	2	2

And how often would you say you drive 70 miles per hour or more...

	All	Gender		Age			
		Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Most of the Time	10%	14	7	10	15	9	7
Often	15%	16	14	24	18	13	9
Just Once in a While	40%	41	40	39	47	40	36
Never	34%	29	38	27	20	36	46
Don't Know	1%	0	1	0	0	1	2

In the past three years have you personally driven after drinking alcohol?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Yes	18%	18	24	12	24	14	19	17
No	82%	81	75	88	76	86	80	83
Don't Know	0%	1	1	0	0	0	1	0

	17-29		30-44		45-59		60+	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Yes	24%	15	14	20	19	17	17	23
No	76%	85	86	80	80	83	83	76
Don't Know	0%	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

In the past three years have you personally been involved in any kind of a crash?

	All	All	Gender		Age			
	2011	2010	Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Yes	16%	16	17	16	28	16	12	13
No	84%	84	83	84	72	84	88	86

	17-29		30-44		45-59		60+	
	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010
Yes	28%	21	16	16	12	15	13	14
No	72%	79	84	84	88	85	86	86

How would you rate your own driving skills compared to most other drivers on the road?

	All	Gender		Age			
		Men	Women	17-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Above Average	68%	76	60	53	69	75	69
Average	32%	23	39	47	31	25	29
Below Average	0%	0	1	0	0	0	1
Don't Know/Refused	0%	0	0	0	0	0	1