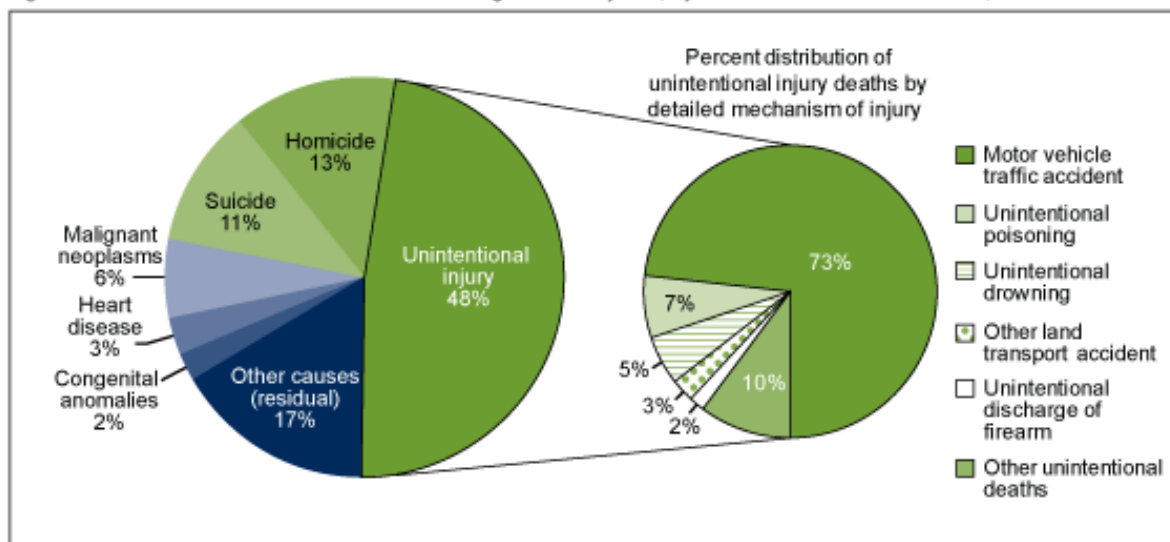


The teenage years are a wonderful and difficult time in every life for kids **and** parents! Your teen is on the brink of adulthood, but is still a child in many ways. It may seem that so many parts of their life are out of your control. The truth is, there are many things you can do to safely steer your teen through these years.

The leading causes of death to teens include:

1. Motor vehicle accidents.
2. Homicide.
3. Suicide.
4. Unintentional poisonings or drug overdose.
5. Other accidents. This includes drowning, injuries from guns, and pedestrian injuries.

Figure 2. Percent distribution of all deaths to teenagers 12–19 years, by cause of death: United States, 1999–2006



SOURCE: National Vital Statistics System, Mortality.

How can I help my teen be safe?

Take time to talk about safety. Share your views and remember what it was like to be a teen. Give your teen credit for being able to make good choices. Be a good safety role model. Wear your seat belt every time you drive your car. Do not drink and drive. Do not talk on the phone or text when driving. Wear a helmet when you ride a bike.

Motor vehicles

- Every person in the car buckles up on every ride. One of the best ways to keep teens safe is by using a seat belt.
- Make a family rule: zero tolerance for drinking or impaired driving. There is no safe amount of alcohol a teen can drink before driving.
- Limit the number of passengers in your teen's car. The number of passengers, especially if they are male, is directly related to the risk of having a crash.
- Distractions like texting, talking on the phone and checking email are dangerous for any driver, but especially for inexperienced drivers. Anything that takes the driver's eyes from the road creates danger for everyone around them.
- Teens need encouragement to speak up if they feel unsafe.

Bicycles and pedestrians

- Stress the need to follow safety rules. When walking or riding a bike, your teen should follow all laws.
- Bicyclists, motorcycle drivers and passengers must wear helmets. Helmets reduce the chance of serious head injuries by 85 percent.
- Be sure the brakes on your teen's bike work properly.
- Have your teen wear bright, light-colored clothing after dark. A bicycle light should also be used. Most fatal accidents occur at dusk and at night because cars cannot see the bicyclist.
- All bikes must have reflectors on the front and rear and on the wheel spokes.
- Use the bike lane, if it there is one.

Guns

- Think about having a gun-free household. If this is not possible, limit access to firearms. Keep guns unloaded and safely locked away.
- Put a trigger lock on each gun and keep it safely locked.
- If guns are used for hunting or target shooting, be sure your teen is trained on how to handle, clean and store the gun. An adult should supervise your teen when hunting or target shooting.
- Insist that guns never be used as a toy or in games.
- When your teen visits the home of a friend, ask that family if they keep firearms in their home.
- Do not ignore your teen's anger, rage or thoughts of suicide.
- Make it clear to your teen that explosives and firecrackers are off limits.

Water-related injuries or drowning

- Be sure your teen knows how to swim.
- Teach your teen to avoid swimming, fishing or boating in rivers, canals or ravines in early spring or after heavy rains. The water is high and moving fast in the spring. This makes it very dangerous.
- Make it clear that drinking alcohol or taking drugs and doing water activities do not mix.
- Never let your teen be on a frozen pond or lake in the winter without adult supervision. It does not matter if they are going to snowmobile, ice skate, play hockey or do ice fishing. Many drownings happen in winter months when people fall through the ice.
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Alcohol and drug related injuries and deaths

- Always model responsible use of alcohol in your home and around your teen. Never leave your home unsupervised where teens could have access to your liquor.
- Do not let your medicine cabinet be the neighborhood dealer. Lock up or get rid of all controlled substances, including those for ADHD, pain, anxiety and muscle relaxers.
- Monitor your teen's behavior and note any changes in behavior, school performance or peer groups. See your pediatrician early for any concerns.
- Pay attention to distinct odors, appearance of eyes and behavior when your teen returns home
- Be aware for signs of drug use and paraphernalia. Some may be eye drops, incense or air fresheners, lighters, foil, bent spoons and other unusual objects. You may find them in their rooms and car.
- Discuss any concerns with your teen. Many teens will begin experimenting with drugs and alcohol to cover up symptoms of depression or anxiety or problems with peers. If there are on-going issues, intervene early. Talk to your teen's pediatrician for a referral to substance use counselor or therapist.

Sport-related injuries

- Minor injuries are a natural part of sports. However, an athletic trainer or doctor should be seen for injuries such as head injuries, sprains and strains. Do not hesitate to seek medical help or advice. Never continue to play after a head injury, especially if followed by headache, vision problems, nausea, dizziness, loss of consciousness or other signs of concussion.
- Be sure your teen has regular physical exams. High-schoolers should have an exam every year.
- Make your teen responsible for safety. Teach them to set limits for physical risk-taking. Tell them not to play through an injury. They should not try to do a dangerous maneuver, even when told to do so by a coach or a peer.

What should I do in an emergency?

Have a plan for what you will do if your teen needs emergency help. Write down emergency information and hang a copy near every phone in your home. Include the following:

- **Fire department phone number.** In case of fire (“911”).
- **Rescue squad phone number.** In case of injury, illness or if your teen needs CPR (“911”).
- **Poison center phone number.** In case your teen eats or is in contact with something that is dangerous. The Poison Center’s toll-free number at Children’s Wisconsin is 1-800-222-1222.
- **Your name, address and phone number.**
- **Directions to your house.**

ALERT: Call your child’s doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.