

# Facts + Statistics: Distracted driving

## Auto

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Activities that take drivers' attention off the road, including talking or texting on cellphones, eating, talking with passengers, adjusting vehicle controls and other distractions, are a major safety threat. [The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) (NHTSA) gauges distracted driving by collecting data on [distraction-affected crashes](#), which focus on distractions that are most likely to result in crashes such as dialing a cellphone, texting or being distracted by another person or an outside event. In 2018, 2,841 people were killed in crashes involving distractions. There were 2,648 distraction-affected fatal crashes, accounting for 8 percent of all fatal crashes in the nation.

## Fatal Crashes Involving Distracted Drivers, 2018

- Distraction was a factor in 9 percent of fatal crashes reported in 2017.

|                            | Crashes       | Drivers       | Fatalities    |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Total fatal crashes</b> | <b>33,654</b> | <b>51,490</b> | <b>36,560</b> |

| <b>Distraction-affected fatal crashes</b>                     |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|
| Number of distraction-affected fatal crashes                  | 2,628 | 2,688 | 2,841 |
| Percent of total fatal crashes                                | 8%    | 5%    | 8%    |
| <b>Cellphone in use in distraction-affected fatal crashes</b> |       |       |       |
| Number of cellphone distraction-affected fatal crashes        | 349   | 354   | 385   |
| Percent of fatal distraction-affected crashes                 | 13%   | 13%   | 14%   |

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

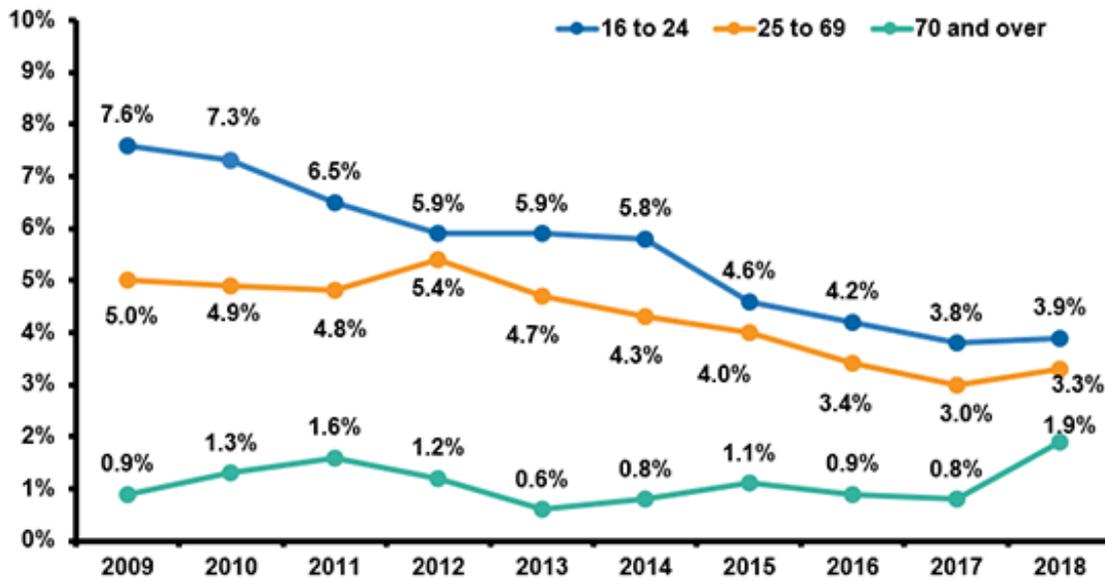
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- Cellphone use was a factor in 14 percent of the 2,935 fatal distraction-affected crashes but in only 1.2 percent of the total 34,247 fatal crashes reported in 2017.

## Cellphone Use As A Distraction

There were 349 fatal crashes in 2018 that were reported to have involved the use of cellphones as a distraction. Over the last five years of reporting, 2014 to 2018, cellphones were reported as a distraction for 13 percent of all distracted drivers in fatal crashes. In 2018, 385 people died in fatal crashes that involved the use of cellphones or other cellphone-related activities as distractions.

## Driver Handheld Cellphone Use By Age, 2009-2018 (1)



(1) Percent of all drivers using handheld cellphones.

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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Laws that prohibit all drivers from holding and using cellphones and other electronic devices while driving can help raise public awareness of the dangers of driving while using these devices and help lower crashes. Laws proscribing the use of cellphones vary from state to state. According to the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#), as of December 2020, talking on a hand-held cellphone while driving is banned in 24 states and the District of Columbia. Text messaging is banned for all drivers in 48 states and the District of Columbia. Laws for novice drivers are even more restrictive: the use of all cellphones by novice drivers is restricted in 37 states and the District of Columbia, and novice drivers are banned from texting in Missouri.

In Georgia, traffic fatalities fell 2.3 percent in 2018 compared with 2017, according to the [Georgia Department of Transportation](#). Injuries and collision claims fell as well, due in part to a law, effective July 2018, that bans Georgia motorists from holding cellphones and other electronic devices. Robert Hartwig, director of the Center for Risk and Uncertainty Management at the University of South Carolina, [presented](#) this conclusion before the Georgia House Insurance Committee in February 2019.

In Virginia, IIHS [research](#) found that while overall hand-held phone interactions fell between 2014 and 2018, 3.4 percent of drivers in the state were observed manipulating a cellphone, compared to 2.3 percent in 2014. This development indicates that drivers are using their phones in riskier ways. Analysts at the [Virginia Tech Transportation Institute](#) found that using hands-free technology allows drivers to make calls and perform other tasks while keeping their hands on the wheel and eyes on the road. They found that drivers who used a hand-held phone

increased their crash risk by 2 to 3.5 times, compared to model drivers defined as alert, attentive, and sober.

Teen drivers reported 55 percent fewer hand-held phone conversations in states where hand-held calling bans were in place for all drivers, regardless of age, compared to states that had no bans on hand-held calls. However, universal (all-driver) texting bans did not fully discourage teens from texting while driving, and bans limited to just young drivers were not effective in reducing either hand-held conversations or texting. Even with laws in place, about one-third of teen drivers were still talking on the phone and texting while driving. These findings were reported in a 2018 [study](#) that spanned four years from the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital and used data from a national survey to examine the effectiveness of state-level cellphone laws in decreasing teens' use of cellphones while driving. The researchers were from West Virginia University and the University of Minnesota, and their findings were published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

For a discussion on state laws banning texting while driving, see [Facts and Statistics, Highway Safety](#), Distracted driving.

NHTSA's distracted driving [webpage](#), has more information on distracted driving. "It Can Wait", a public awareness campaign funded by four by wireless carriers, provides resources on the dangers of distracted driving, including "From One Second to the Next", a film by director Werner Herzog profiling the victims of distracted driving.

Distracted driving, fueled by the proliferation of smart phones is one of the factors contributing to the recent spike in accident claims. Insurers are increasingly partnering with app developers or creating their own apps that curb distracted driving by limiting the drivers ability to use their smartphones while driving.

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