



## Don't txt n drive: Teens not getting msg

by **Carla Kemp** • Senior Editor

Teens can get hundreds of text messages a day, but one message they aren't getting is that they shouldn't text and drive.

Nearly 43% of high school students of driving age who were surveyed in 2011 reported texting while driving at least once in the past 30 days, according to a study to be presented Saturday, May 4, at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Washington, D.C.

"Texting while driving has become, in the words of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, a 'national epidemic,'" said principal investigator Alexandra Bailin, a research assistant at Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York.

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death among teenagers, and using a phone while driving significantly increases the risk of accidents in this age group. The specific act of texting while driving has been found to raise the risk of a crash by 23 times, leading many to conclude that texting while driving is more dangerous than driving while intoxicated.

"Although teens may be developmentally predisposed to engage in risk-taking behavior, reducing the prevalence of texting while driving is an obvious and important way to ensure the health and safety of teen drivers, their passengers and the surrounding public," Bailin said.

To determine the prevalence of texting while driving among youths, Bailin and her colleagues analyzed data from the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 7,833 high school students who were old enough to get a driver's license in their state.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducts the national survey every two years to monitor six types of health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability and social problems among U.S. youths. For the first time, the 2011 survey included a question about texting while driving: "During the past 30 days, on how many days did you text or e-mail while driving a car or other vehicle?"

The researchers also sought to determine whether other high-risk behaviors are associated with texting while driving and if state laws prohibiting drivers from texting are effective among high school students.

Survey results showed that males were more likely to text while driving than females (46% vs. 40%), and the prevalence of texting increased with age (52% of those over 18 years; 46% of 17-year-olds; 33% of 16-year-olds; and 26% of 15-year-olds).

Furthermore, teens who reported texting while driving were more likely to engage in other risky behaviors such as driving under the influence of alcohol, having unprotected sex and using an indoor tanning device.

"By identifying associated high-risk behaviors such as these," Bailin said, "it is our hope that we can develop more effective mechanisms to reduce texting while driving."

The researchers also found that state laws banning texting while driving had little effect: 39% of teens reported texting in states where it is illegal vs. 44% of teens in states that have no restrictions.

"Although texting while driving was slightly less common in states that prohibit it, the reality is that millions of teens text while driving," said senior investigator Andrew Adesman, M.D., FAAP, chief of developmental and behavioral pediatrics at Cohen Children's Medical Center of New York. "Regrettably, our analysis suggests that state laws do not significantly reduce teen texting while driving.

"Technological solutions will likely need to be developed to significantly reduce the frequency of texting while driving," Dr. Adesman concluded. "When it comes to teen texting while driving, phones will have to get smarter if they are to protect teens (and others) from doing dumb things."

To view the abstract, "Texting While Driving Among High School Students: Analysis of 2011 Data from the National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS)," go to [http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS13L1\\_1512.160](http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view.php?nu=PAS13L1_1512.160).