

Enjoy Your Summer - Drive Safely!

Summer is here and so are vacations. That often means more time in the car. Many high school and college students are out of school and have more time to be on the road. The Bergen County Department of Health Services reminds you to “Put It Down,” drive safely and arrive safely.

Driver distraction could present a serious and potentially deadly danger. In 2009, 5,474 people were killed on U.S. roads and an estimated additional 448,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes that were reported to have involved distracted driving. Distracted driving comes in various forms and includes cell phone use and texting as well as eating, drinking, talking with passengers and using in-vehicle technologies and portable electronic devices such as radios or CD players.

There are three main types of distraction:

- Visual — taking your eyes off the road
- Manual — taking your hands off the wheel
- Cognitive — taking your mind off what you’re doing

While all distractions can endanger drivers’ safety, texting is the most alarming because it involves all three types of distraction.

Research on distracted driving reveals some surprising facts:

- 20 percent of injury crashes in 2009 involved reports of distracted driving.
- Of those killed in distracted-driving-related crashes, 995 involved reports of a cell phone as a distraction (18% of fatalities in distraction-related crashes).
- In 2009, 5,474 people were killed in U.S. roadways and an estimated additional 448,000 were injured in motor vehicle crashes that were reported to have involved distracted driving.
- The age group with the greatest proportion of distracted drivers was the under-20 age group – 16 percent of all drivers younger than 20 involved in fatal crashes were reported to have been distracted while driving. Their lack of driving experience can contribute to critical misjudgments if they become distracted, yet they text more than any other age group.
- Drivers who use hand-held devices are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves.
- Using a cell phone use while driving, whether it’s hand-held or hands-free, delays a driver's reactions as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent.

This summer, keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road! Cell phones and texting are easy, fast and convenient ways to stay in touch with family and friends. The problem starts when drivers use cell phones and text; these distractions are a recipe for accidents. Remember these simple words, “Put It Down.”

For more information on distracted driving, contact the Bergen County Health Resource Request Line at 201-634-2704. Request a copy of a Parent-Teen Driving Contract and brochure on distracted driving.