Risky Driving Behaviors Among Teens in Natick (Grades 9-12)

2010 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

Teen driving safety and drinking and driving have always been concerns among families with teens learning how to drive. However, the widespread use of smartphones among teens has increased attention about the risks youths face while driving, even with new state legislation that prohibits junior operators from using mobile devices while driving.* The *MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey* has collected information on drinking and driving behavior in Natick since 2006 and on distracted driving, including texting while driving, since 2010. This fact sheet summarizes data for the 1,114 Natick High School students that took the survey in 2010, representing 87% of youth.

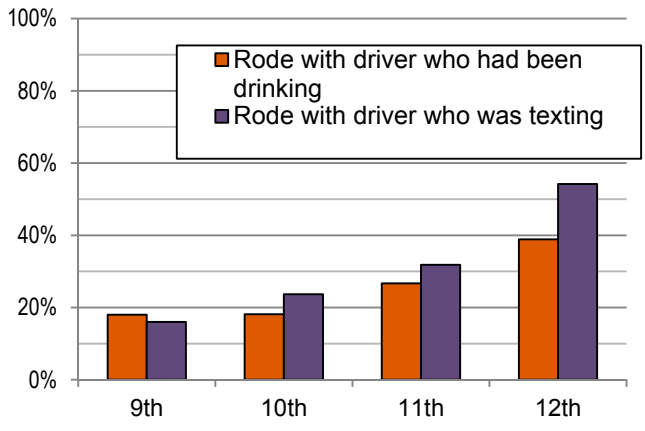
How many adolescents are involved in risky driving behaviors?

- **One in four high school students (25%) rode in a car driven by someone who was drinking in the past 30 days,** and 17% rode in a car driven by someone *under 21* who had been drinking during that time.
- **Among students who drive, 18% reported driving after drinking in the past 30 days**.
- **30% of all students said that they rode in a car driven by another high school student who was texting or emailing in the past 30 days**. 37% of students who drive reported texting or emailing while they were driving in the past 30 days.
- **In the past 30 days, 41% of high school students rode in a car driven by another high school student in which they or someone else was not wearing a seatbelt.**

Which teens are involved in risky driving?

- **Reports of unsafe driving behaviors (past 30 days) increase substantially during the high school years [Figure 1]:**
  - Riding in a car with a driver who had been drinking alcohol increases from 9th grade (18%) to 12th grade (39%).
  - Riding in a car with a driver *under 21* who had been drinking alcohol increases from 9% to 35%.
  - Riding as a passenger with a driver who was texting or emailing increases from 16% to 54%.
  - Riding in a car with someone who wasn't wearing a seatbelt increases from 24% to 61%.
- **In general, reports of these passenger behaviors are similar among males and females.** However, among students who drive, more males than females report driving after drinking (20% vs. 16%) and texting while driving (42% vs. 32%).

Figure 1. Risky passenger behaviors by grade, 2010



How have reports of drinking and driving changed over time?

- **Reports of riding with a driver who had been drinking alcohol decreased from 26% in 2006 to 22% in 2008, and then increased slightly to 25% in 2010.**
- **We're still learning about distracted driving.** 2010 was the first year we collected information about texting while driving and other distracted driving behaviors. Trend data will be available following the administration of our fall 2012 survey.

What other risks are linked to drinking and texting while driving?

- **Drinking and driving is linked with high-risk drinking.** Students who report binge drinking are more likely than their peers to report being passengers in cars with a driver who had been drinking (59% vs. 15%) or drinking and driving themselves (50% vs. 5% among drivers).
- **Youth who ride in cars with drivers who had been drinking are less likely to use seatbelts consistently.** 18% of youth who rode with a drinking driver report using a seatbelt never or rarely, compared with 2% of those who did not. Youth who report driving after drinking were also more likely to never/rarely wear a seatbelt compared with their peers (23% vs. 5%).
- **Youth who report texting or emailing while driving are also less likely to report using a seatbelt consistently.** 12% of drivers who text report using a seatbelt rarely/never, compared with 5% of drivers who did not text.

METROWEST HEALTH FOUNDATION

The *MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey* (MWAHS) is conducted by Education Development Center, Inc. with funding from the MetroWest Health Foundation. The MWAHS is an anonymous survey of youth in 24 communities. One of the largest student surveys in the nation, its goal is to inform local policies and programs. In 2010, 37,901 students took surveys, representing over 90% of the students in the participating districts.

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**Massachusetts Safe Driving Law, enacted on September 30, 2010.*