

# More Than A Quarter of Houston Teens Read a Text or Email Every Time They Drive, According to Study by University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute and Toyota

July 24, 2013

TORRANCE, Calif., July 24, 2013 – Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. (TMS), today announced Houston findings from a major, national study of teen drivers (ages 16 to 18) and parents of teen drivers conducted jointly with the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI).

The UMTRI/Toyota Teen Driver Distraction Study, the largest scientific survey of its kind, found that twenty-seven percent of Houston teens said they read a text or email every time they drive, compared to nearly thirty percent nationally. Twenty-four percent respond to a text while driving, which is the same as the national average for teens. Perhaps even more alarming, about one in five Houston teens (22 percent) have extended conversations via text message while driving.

## Other key findings include:

- **Cell phone use by teen drivers and parents in Houston is pervasive:** Sixty-seven percent of teens in the Houston area report using a cell phone while driving (hands-free and/or hand-held). Eighty-three percent of parents do the same.
- **Teens in Houston regularly drive with young passengers and no adults, despite serious risks:** 62 percent of teen drivers in Houston report they drive with two or three teen passengers and no adults in their car, compared to 69 percent nationally. According to the AAA Foundation, this behavior is associated with a doubling of a driver's risk of being killed in a crash.[\[1\]](#) More than a third (35 percent) of teen drivers in Houston drive with more than three teen passengers and no adults, compared to 44 percent nationally, which is associated with roughly a quadrupling of a driver's risk of being killed in a crash.[\[2\]](#)
- **Digital and social media distractions are creating significant driving risks in the Houston area, especially for teens:** Teens in Houston search for music on a portable music player, such as an iPod, much more frequently than parents do while driving. More than half of Houston teens (55 percent) say they do so, while just 13 percent of parents do. In addition, more than one in ten Houston teens (12 percent) report that they update or check social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, while driving.

Commenting on the study findings, Dr. Tina Sayer, Principal Engineer for Toyota's Collaborative Safety Research Center (CSRC) and teen safe driving expert, said: "Driver education begins the day a child's car seat is turned around to face front. The one piece of advice I would give to parents to help them keep newly licensed drivers safe on the road is to always be the driver you want your teen to be."

The Houston findings of the UMTRI/Toyota Study are based on a telephone survey of 300 teen drivers and 402 parents of teen drivers in the Houston area. Additionally, the study includes local surveys in Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C. and Long Island, N.Y.

The Study, sponsored by CSRC, was designed to shed new light on frequently discussed driving risks and to identify effective recommendations to help keep teens safe and help parents serve as more effective driving role models. The Study also looked at a range of risk factors that receive less public attention but pose great risks on the road as well as the role parents and peers play in encouraging distracted driving behaviors.

[\[1\]](#) AAA *Foundation for Traffic Safety*, “*Teen Driver Risk in Relation to Age and Number of Passengers*”

[\[2\]](#) *Ibid.*