

Topic:

DRIVER LICENSES; AGE OF MAJORITY; JUVENILES;


Location:

MOTOR VEHICLES - LICENSES;



The Connecticut General Assembly

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TO:

FROM: James J. Fazzalaro, Principal Analyst

RE: Drivers' Licenses for Minors

You asked if there are any states with a minimum driver age over 16. You also wanted to know if any states issue limited or restricted licenses to young drivers.

SUMMARY

In one way or another, 16-year olds are allowed to drive in every state but Massachusetts, where the minimum driving age is 16 years, 6 months. Twenty states issue unrestricted drivers' licenses to 16-year olds without any requirements for driver's education training. Two states do this for 15-year olds. More commonly, unrestricted driver's licenses are issued at age 17 or 18, but for a younger person to get an unrestricted license, he must have completed a driver's education training course approved by the state. Connecticut and 17 other states require driver's education training for 16- and 17-year olds, but issue unrestricted licenses.

In nine states, besides the requirement for driver's education, some young drivers cannot drive during certain hours of the day, but are unrestricted as to where they may drive. Illinois, New Jersey, and New York have driving curfews for 16-year old drivers. Louisiana has them for 15- and 16-year old drivers, and Pennsylvania has them for 16- and 17-year old drivers. Although South Carolina and South Dakota allow unrestricted driving at age 16, they allow minors as young as 15 years old and 14 years old, respectively, to drive except during

curfew hours. Massachusetts has restricted hours for 16 1/2- and 17-year olds and Maryland has them for 16- and 17-year olds. But in Massachusetts, the minor can drive during the curfew hours as long as he is accompanied by a parent or guardian. In Maryland, the minor must be accompanied by someone with an unrestricted license.

Numerous states, many of them with large rural or agricultural areas, have other types of restricted licenses that apply in certain situations. Some are home-school or home-work licenses for drivers who are either too young for regular unrestricted licenses or who do not have access to driver's education programs required for unrestricted licenses. In certain cases, the driver must take prescribed routes. Some states issue special licenses for farm-related activities and these may have hourly restrictions or be valid only within a certain distance from the farm. Hardship licenses are issued to 13-, 14-, and 15-year olds in some states. Some of these hardship licenses have time or place restrictions.

MINIMUM DRIVING AGES

Unrestricted Licenses Issued Without Driver Education

In 17 states (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming), a 16-year old can get an unrestricted driver's license for a passenger vehicle without having first taken any type of driver's education course. In Georgia, a 16-year old must complete a drug and alcohol awareness course, but apparently not driver's education training before a license is issued. Two states, Hawaii and Mississippi, allow unrestricted licenses for 15-year olds.

Unrestricted or Restricted Licenses Issued After Driver's Education

All the other states establish either age 16, 17, 18, or 19 as the minimum age for unrestricted licensure, but allow younger drivers (some as young as 13) to be licensed if they have taken driver's education courses or operate under certain restrictions. Montana and New Mexico allow unrestricted licensure at 16, but also allow 15-year olds to get unrestricted licenses if they have taken driver's education training. Four states (Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, and New Jersey) issue unrestricted licenses to 17-year olds, but give 16-year olds who have taken driver's education unrestricted licenses too. Idaho allows 15-year olds to drive during daylight hours only and New Jersey allows 16-year olds who have had driver education to drive, but restricts the hours during which they may do so.

Connecticut issues unrestricted licenses to 18-year olds, but allows drivers as young as 16 to get unrestricted licenses if they have taken driver's education. There are 17 other states that have similar requirements (California, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin). New York and Pennsylvania license 16-year olds who have taken driver's education and Massachusetts does the same for minors who are 16 years, six months old, but all three states limit the hours during which these minors may drive. Virginia issues unrestricted licenses to 19-year olds, but requires driver's education for applicants down to age 16. Colorado issues unrestricted licenses at 18 years old, but issues a "minor" license to 16- and 17-year olds. Our information did not indicate whether this minor license requires driver's education, but it may require some special training or, at least, parental consent.

RESTRICTED LICENSES FOR YOUNG DRIVERS

There are 28 states that allow drivers who are under the minimum age for unrestricted licenses to drive under certain restrictive conditions. Half of them allow drivers as young as 14 and Montana allows 13-year old drivers under hardship conditions. These restrictions are usually of two types. One type limits the hours when younger drivers can drive and the other limits the types of trips they can make. Some states have both types of restrictions.

Hourly Restrictions

Florida allows 15-year olds to drive only during daylight hours until they are within six months of their 16th birthday. Idaho limits 15-year olds to daylight hours. Minnesota issues daylight-only licenses to 15-year olds in farm areas. The licenses are valid only within a 20-mile radius of the farm house. Ohio and Wisconsin issue daylight licenses for 14- and 15-year olds under hardship conditions only. In Wisconsin, the child's parent or guardian must show that it is necessary for the child to attend school, work, or the parent's business.

In several states, young drivers are not allowed to drive during certain hours, but are not restricted as to where they may drive. There are limited exceptions to some of the curfews, usually for employment or education purposes. In Illinois, 16-year olds cannot drive between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. Sunday through Thursday, and midnight to 6 a.m. on Friday through Sunday morning. Curfew hours for 15- and 16-year olds in Louisiana are 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Monday through Thursday and midnight to 5 a.m. on Friday through Sunday morning. In Massachusetts, drivers under 18 years old must be accompanied by a parent or guardian when driving between 1 a.m. and 4 a.m. A similar requirement applies in Maryland where 16- and 17-year olds must be accompanied during the hours from midnight to 5 a.m. by someone who holds an unrestricted driver's license.

In New Jersey, a 16-year old can get a restricted license if 1) the child is enrolled in a state-approved behind-the-wheel driver's education program or 2) the child is engaged in an agricultural pursuit. In either case, the child cannot drive between midnight and 5 a.m. Pennsylvania also restricts 16- and 17-year olds during the midnight to 5 a.m. period. In South Carolina, 15-year olds cannot drive any vehicle except farm equipment between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. In South Dakota, 14- and 15-year olds cannot drive between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. In New York, a 16-year old cannot drive alone from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. except to school or work, cannot drive alone at any time in New York City, and is subject to other restrictions in Nassau and Suffolk counties (Long Island). The restricted New York license is also limited to driving vehicles weighing 10,000 pounds or less.

Trip-Restricted Licenses

Several states issue licenses to minors only for certain types of trips. In some cases, these restricted licenses apply to minors who otherwise would be too young to get an unrestricted license or who are old enough for an unrestricted license, but do not have access to driver's education programs. In Iowa, minors between 14 and 17 can drive between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. in order to travel between home and school. If someone who is 16- or 17-years old is enrolled in a school without driver's education or is out of school, the minor can get a license that allows driving between home and work at any time. These licenses can be suspended for one traffic violation and revoked for a second violation. New Hampshire has a similar home-and-school license for 16- and 17-year olds who have no other means of transportation to school and have not completed a driver education program. Oregon allows students as young as age 14 to drive between home and school if no other transportation is available and both the school principal and county sheriff approve.

Kansas allows 15-year olds to drive between home and school without time restrictions if accompanied by a licensed adult. Also, 14- and 15-year olds can get a license for home-to-work travel or farm-related driving. In Maine, 15- year olds can get licenses for travel between home and school or work during school or employment hours. Minnesota issues a license to a 15-year old for driving within a 20-mile radius of his farm house during daylight hours. In Nebraska, 14- and 15-year olds who live at least 1.5 miles away from school and either live outside a city or go to a school outside a city may drive themselves and other family members to and from school during school hours. Nevada has a similar license, but the minor must follow a prescribed route and the license is valid only during the school year.

Hardship or Emergency Licenses

Several states issue special licenses to certain drivers, usually those who are under the minimum driving age of 16 but who need transportation because of hardship or emergency. In Ohio, hardship licenses for 14- and 15-year olds are limited to daylight hours. Similar licenses in Tennessee allow driving only between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. and are restricted to work, school, church, grocery, doctor, or home-farm transit. California issues licenses to 14- and 15- year olds when the registration agency determines that all transportation available to them is inadequate and driving is necessary to and from school, because of a family illness, or to and from work or a family enterprise. Certification of the hardship and a statement must be provided by the school principal, physician, or

employer as applicable. In Alaska, a 14- and 15-year old can get a hardship license if the state public safety department determines that the minor needs to drive because of a family death, illness, or other critical happening.

Montana issues a hardship licenses to someone age 13-15 to provide transportation to school or the school bus or if “dire family need” can be shown. Oregon issues emergency licenses to 14- and 15-year olds for specific purposes and over designated routes only. The special permit must be approved by the county sheriff, county judge, or, if it is work-related, by the employer. In Wyoming, a 14- or 15-year old can be issued a restricted license if the Highway Patrol approves a notarized statement indicating extreme hardship. The license is valid only for driving within a 50-mile radius of home and between 5 a.m. and 8 p.m.

In Washington, anyone under 18 years old can apply for an agricultural license that allows driving in the area of the home and farm. There is no minimum age for this license.

In North Dakota, a 14-or 15-year old can be issued a restricted license allowing him to drive only his parent's or guardian's car. In Missouri, a minor who is 15 and 1/2-years old can drive if accompanied by a parent or guardian.

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