

## The Safety Attitudes of Older Drivers

### Q: Are older people concerned about driver safety issues?

**A:** Yes. According to new research from the American Automobile Association (AAA) Foundation for Traffic Safety, older drivers are “generally a very safe group of motorists [but] there are some unsafe driving behaviors that still have a high level of acceptance, among seniors.”

86% of Americans ages 65 and older still drive---roughly 36 million drivers. One in six drivers on U.S. roads today are 65 years of age or older. 91% of elders in the AAA survey report that they have had no moving violations in the past 2 years, and have not had a car crash during the same period. The AAA Foundation says safe driving attitudes are important among seniors, because they are more likely to have a medical condition or use medications that can affect their driving. Plus as people age, fragility begins to make crash survival and recovery more difficult.

The AAA polled older drivers about a number of driving safety issues. A vast majority of older drivers strongly disapprove of all unsafe driving behaviors included in the survey---but drivers in the age 65-69 are more accepting of some unsafe driving behaviors:

- **License Renewals:** Over 70% of older drivers support requiring drivers age 75 and older to renew their license in person. More than 70% support requiring drivers age 75 and older to pass a medical screening at renewal. Support for these measures was greatest among drivers age 75+.
- **Cell Phone Use:** Most older drivers disapprove of texting and e-mailing while driving, or checking/posting on social media while driving. But as far as talking on cell phones, there were some differences by age: 70-74 year old and drivers 75 and older were significantly more likely than drivers ages 65-69 to disapprove of drivers talking on hand-held phones. The rate of disapproval of talking on hands-free phones while driving was noticeably higher among the oldest group (62%) than the younger elders (54%).

- **Seatbelts:** Most older drivers say they always wear a seatbelt while driving—but 25% of drivers age 75+ say they have driven without wearing a seatbelt.
- **Speeding:** A majority of all older drivers support using speed cameras to ticket driving 10 mph over the limit in residential areas and urban areas. Yet 46% of older drivers report having driven 15 mph over the limit on freeways and as many as 48% report having driven 10 mph over the limit on residential streets. The youngest group of elderly drivers is more likely to speed and to find it an acceptable behavior, and they are much less likely to support speed cameras.
- **Running A Red Light:** In spite of the fact that nearly all older drivers say running a red light is unacceptable—33% report that they have run a red light in the past month on an occasion when they could have stopped safely.
- **Impaired Driving:** Nearly 100% of older drivers disapprove of driving under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, or both, as well as drowsy driving. More than 60% of older drivers support lowering the legal limit for blood alcohol content while driving. 87% of drivers age 75+ support requiring ignition interlock technology in all new cars to disable the car when a drunk driver tries to start the engine. Drivers ages 75+ were more likely to report drowsy driving, with as many as 29% saying they have driven while drowsy.

“The older drivers’ own personal driving behavior does not in all cases measure up to the standard to which they would like to hold others,” the AAA concluded. “There are some unsafe driving behaviors that still have a high level of acceptance among seniors, which suggests more education is needed.”

For more information on this study please visit [AAAFoundation.org](http://AAAFoundation.org).

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groups. Respondents' support neared 90% for requiring alcohol ignition interlock devices, including for first

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time offenders. Support for requiring ignition interlock technology in all new cars was slightly lower and varied by age group, with 87% of those 75+ expressing support versus 77% of 65

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69 year olds and 78% of 70

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74 year olds.

## Key Findings

### Attitudes Towards Driving Behavior

A vast majority of respondents strongly disapproved of all unsafe driving behaviors included in the survey, however respondents 65

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69 were slightly more accepting of some unsafe driving behaviors:

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46% reported having driven 15 mph hour over the limit on freeways and 41

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48% reported having driven 10 mph over the limit on residential streets.

- Fewer than 10% of respondents in each age group reported having read or typed texts/emails while driving, with drivers 65

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69 were more likely

to report both than drivers in the 2 older age groups.

Drivers 65

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69 were also more likely to report talking on a cell phone while driving than the older age groups, (52% of drivers 65

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69 vs. 45% of those aged 70

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74 and 34% of those aged 75+).

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While 31

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38%

of drivers reported having driven through a red light when they could have stopped safely at least once, only 1% reported having done this fairly often or regularly.

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Drivers ages 75+ were more likely to report drowsy driving than the 2 younger age groups (29% of

drivers 75+ vs. 22% of those aged 65

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69 and 23% of those aged 70

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74)

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Most older drivers reported always wearing a seatbelt while driving, however, drivers 75+ were the most likely to report having driven without wearing a seatbelt (25% of drivers

75+ vs. 18% of those

aged 65

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69 and 16% of those aged 70

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74).

For more information on this study and the AAA Foundation's other senior safety research and materials, please visit

[AAAFoundation.org](http://AAAFoundation.org)

Of all respondents who reported the number of moving violations and crashes over the past two years,

90.8% reported no moving violations and 91.0% had not been involved in a crash in the last two years

there are some unsafe

driving behaviors that still have a high level of acceptance, even among seniors, which

h suggests more education is needed.