

Posted Online: 2007-02-08

Editorial: Teen driving rules

[Comment on this story](#)

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White has unveiled a tough new series of proposed restrictions on teen drivers.

Under White's plan:

- * The Learner's permit for new drivers would increase from three months to nine.
- * The weekday curfew for teen drivers would drop to 10 p.m., instead of 11.
- * Restrictions on teens carrying more than one unrelated teen passenger would increase from six months to a year.
- * New drivers would need six hours of over-the-road driving in driver's ed. Time in driving simulators, if still used, would be an addition.

White's announcement ironically came just days after a fatal one-car crash claimed the life of a Herscher High School student, whose car hit a utility pole on an icy road. That crash marked the seventh school driving fatality in Herscher in a decade.

Herscher is a large, rural school district where students frequently have long commutes to the high school. But studies show the problem is certainly not restricted to Herscher. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for teens. Indeed, your chance of dying in an auto crash are one in 84 in your lifetime. People go nuts over West Nile Virus, school shootings and other peripheral extremely rare events, but dying in an automobile wreck is much more common, and much more preventable.

Another study showed that teen drivers are much more likely to be distracted -- by others in the car, by cell phones, by music, although none of this has been cited in the

Herscher crash. The upshot is that a 16-year-old is three times more likely to die in a crash than all other drivers.

So we would wholeheartedly endorse White's proposed restrictions.

And we would move one other to the table -- for discussion. Why not raise the driving age? Raising the driving age would save oil across the nation, cut medical costs and, most importantly, save lives. For sure, there would be inconveniences, but the pluses may well outnumber the minuses.

An extra hour a day on the school bus would seem "uncool" we're sure. The bus would cut into after-school jobs and extracurricular activities.

But seeing crumpled cars and severe injuries is pretty "uncool" too.