Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
Highway Loss Data Institute

Distracted driving

Concern is mounting about the effects of phone use and texting while driving.

Cellphones and texting

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Talking on a hand-held cellphone while driving is banned in 14 states and the District of Columbia.

The use of all cellphones by novice drivers is restricted in 37 states and the District of Columbia.

Text messaging is banned for all drivers in 46 states and the District of Columbia. In addition, novice drivers are banned from texting in two states (Missouri and Texas).

Many localities have enacted their own bans on cellphones or text messaging. In some but not all states, local jurisdictions need specific statutory authority to do so. In addition, most school bus drivers are banned from texting and using hand-held cellphones by state code, regulation or school district policy.

The table and maps below show the states that have cellphone laws, whether they specifically ban text messaging, and whether they are enforced as primary or secondary laws. Under secondary laws, an officer must have some other reason to stop a vehicle before citing a driver for using a cellphone. Laws without this restriction are called primary.

Table | Map: hand-held bans | Map: texting bans | Map: young driver all cellphone bans

Laws restricting cellphone use and texting

State	Hand-held ban	Young drivers all cellphone ban	Texting ban	Enforcement
Alabama	no	16-year-old drivers; 17-year-old drivers who have held an intermediate license for fewer than 6 months	all drivers	primary: texting by all drivers; secondary: cellphone use by young drivers
Alaska	no	no	all drivers	primary
Arizona	no	no	no	not applicable
Arkansas	drivers 18 or older but younger than 21; school and highway work zones	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary: texting by all drivers and cellphone use by school bus drivers; secondary: cellphone use by young drivers, drivers in school and work zones[1]

California	all drivers	drivers younger than 18	all drivers[2]	primary: hand-held and texting by drivers 18 and older; secondary: drivers younger than 18[1]
Colorado	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Connecticut	all drivers	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Delaware	all drivers	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary
District of Columbia	all drivers	learner's permit holders	all drivers	primary
Florida	no	no	all drivers	secondary
Georgia	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Hawaii	all drivers	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Idaho	no	no	all drivers	primary
Illinois	all drivers	drivers younger than 19 and learner's permit holders younger than 19	all drivers	primary
Indiana	no	drivers younger than 21	all drivers	primary
Iowa	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary for learner's permit and intermediate license holders; secondary for texting
Kansas	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary
Kentucky	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Louisiana	drivers in signed school zones; with respect to novice drivers, see footnote[3]	all novice drivers, see footnote for detail[3]	all drivers	primary[3]
Maine	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary

Maryland	all drivers	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Massachusetts	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Michigan	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders (level 1 and 2); integrated voice-operated systems excepted	all drivers	primary
Minnesota	no	learner's permit holders and provisional license holders during the first 12 months after licensing	all drivers	primary
Mississippi	no	no	all drivers	primary
Missouri	no	no	drivers 21 and younger	primary
Montana	no	no	no	not applicable
Nebraska	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders younger than 18	all drivers	secondary
Nevada	all drivers	no	all drivers	primary
New Hampshire	all drivers	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
New Jersey	all drivers	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary
New Mexico	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary
New York	all drivers	no	all drivers	primary
North Carolina	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
North Dakota	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Ohio	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary for drivers younger than 18; secondary for texting

Oklahoma	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	no[4]	all drivers	primary
Oregon	all drivers	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Pennsylvania	no	no	all drivers	primary
Rhode Island	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
South Carolina	no	no	all drivers	primary
South Dakota	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	secondary
Tennessee	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary
Texas	drivers in school crossing zones and on public school property during the time the reduced speed limit applies	drivers younger than 18	drivers in school crossing zones and on public school property during the time the reduced speed limit applies; bus drivers with minor passengers; drivers younger than 18	primary
Utah	no[5]	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary[5]
Vermont	all drivers	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary
Virginia	no	drivers younger than 18	all drivers	primary; secondary for drivers younger than 18
Washington	all drivers	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary
West Virginia	all drivers	drivers younger than 18 who hold either a learner's permit or an intermediate license	all drivers	primary
Wisconsin	no	learner's permit and intermediate license holders	all drivers	primary
Wyoming	no	no	all drivers	primary

[1] The laws in Arkansas and California prohibit police from stopping a vehicle to determine if a driver is in compliance with the law. Clearly, that language prohibits the use of checkpoints to enforce the law, but it has been

interpreted as the functional equivalent of secondary provisions that typically state the officer may not stop someone suspected of a violation unless there is other, independent, cause for a stop.

[2] California drivers who are 18 and older may dictate, send or listen to text-based messages if they're using voice-activated, hands-free devices.

[3] In Louisiana, all learner's permit holders, irrespective of age, and all intermediate license holders are prohibited from driving while using a hand-held cellphone. All drivers younger than 18 are prohibited from using any cellphone. All drivers, irrespective of age, issued a first driver’s license are prohibited from using a cellphone for one year. The cellphone ban is secondary for novice drivers ages 18 and older.

[4] In Oklahoma, learner's permit and intermediate license holders are banned from using a hand-held electronic device while operating a motor vehicle except in life-threatening emergencies.

[5] In 2007, Utah defined careless driving as committing a moving violation (other than speeding) while distracted by use of a handheld cellphone or other activities not related to driving. IIHS reported this as the functional equivalent of a secondary law. In 2012, Utah’s law was modified to specify that a person is not prohibited from using a handheld wireless device while operating a moving motor vehicle when making or receiving a telephone call. In 2014, Utah again amended its law by removing the act of talking on a hand-held phone from the section describing careless driving. In addition, the most recent iteration bans drivers from dialing a hand-held phone and caps the maximum fine at $100 for a first offense provided the offender inflicted no bodily harm.

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