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Understanding Minnesota Traffic Law for Drivers Under Age 18

Graduated Licensing

Below are highlights of the Graduated Licensing law.

Stage 1: Instruction Permit

- Must be at least 15;
- Must complete the appropriate amount of classroom education and be enrolled in behind-the-wheel instruction;
- Must pass the knowledge test, have parent or legal guardian approval; and
- While unlicensed, must not have had a crash-related moving violation or an alcohol/controlled substance-related violation (a violation of one or more statutes, including DWI, Implied Consent, Open Bottle, or Underage Drinking and Driving/Not a Drop Law).
- Permit holder may drive under the supervision of a parent, guardian or other licensed driver 21 or older occupying the seat beside them.
- All passengers under 18 must wear their seat belts/child safety restraints.
- May not operate a vehicle while using a cellular or wireless telephone, whether handheld or hands-free, while vehicle is in operation.

Stage 2: Provisional License

- Must be at least 16 and have completed six hours of behind-the-wheel instruction;
- Must have held a permit for six months, with no convictions for moving violations or alcohol/controlled substance-related violations (a violation of one or more statutes, including DWI, Implied Consent, Open Bottle, or Underage Drinking and Driving/Not a Drop Law)
- Must present a supervised driving log verifying that they have driven under the supervision of a licensed driver at least 21 years of age, for not less than 50 hours, at least 15 of which were at night; or if a parent/guardian completes the parent class and submits a certificate of completion to the driver exam staff at the time of the road test, 40 hours, 15 of which were at night.
- Must pass the road test.
- All passengers under 18 must wear their seat belts/child safety restraints.
- May not operate a vehicle while using a cellular or wireless telephone, whether hand held or hands-free, while vehicle is in operation.

Stage 3: Full License

- Must be at least 18 *or*
- Must have held a provisional license for one year with no convictions for crash-related moving violations, no alcohol/controlled substance-related violations (a violation of one or more statutes, including DWI, Implied Consent, Open Bottle, or Underage Drinking and Driving/Not a Drop Law) and no more than one non-crash-related moving violation; and
- Parent/guardian must attest to at least 10 additional hours of supervised driving.

Vanessa's Law

In May 2004, a law went into effect referred to as "Vanessa's Law" in memory of Vanessa Weiss, who was killed in May 2003 just days before her 16th birthday. She was a passenger in a vehicle driven by an unlicensed 15-year-old. Provisions of this law apply to drivers under age 18.

- An unlicensed teen who received a crash-related moving violation or an alcohol/controlled substance-related violation (a violation of one or more statutes, including DWI, Implied Consent, Open Bottle, or Underage Drinking and Driving/Not a Drop Law) cannot be given a license, including an instruction permit or provisional license, until age 18. When this person turns 18, s/he must:
 - Fulfill all reinstatement requirements, including the payment of fees which can be up to \$680 depending on circumstances;
 - Pass the driver's license knowledge test;
 - Obtain an instruction permit and hold it for at least six months, or three months for persons 19 years of age or older, and then pass the road test.
- A provisional license holder whose driving privilege was revoked due to a crash-related moving violation or an alcohol/controlled substance-related violation cannot regain a license until age 18. At that time, the person must complete the following steps to obtain a full driver's license:
 - Fulfill all reinstatement requirements, including the payment of fees which can be up to \$680 depending on circumstances;
 - Complete the classroom portion of a formal driver education course;
 - Obtain an instruction permit and hold it for three months;
 - Complete a driver's behind-the-wheel class.

Not a Drop Law

In Minnesota, it is illegal for a person under age 21 to consume alcohol. If an underage person drinks and drives, they face penalties under Minnesota's "Not a Drop" law in addition to DWI laws.

Under "Not a Drop," if an officer observes an underage person operating or in physical control of a motor vehicle and determines they have been drinking; they can lose their license for 30 to 180 days. The length of suspension will depend on the driver's prior record.