

Winter 2012 Road Rules: Changes for Junior Drivers

In an effort to enhance safety on Pennsylvania roads, Governor Corbett and the Legislature have agreed on changes to the Vehicle Code involving graduated driver licensing requirements, passenger restrictions for junior drivers and passenger restraint laws. The new rules in Act 81 of 2011 took effect on December 27, 2011. The changes to the law were initiated to help junior drivers receive more comprehensive training, ease young driver distractions through limiting the number of passengers they may carry and improve general highway safety through improvements to passenger restraint laws.

Changes to Junior Driver Training: Act 81 increases supervised, behind-the-wheel skill building for learner's permit holders under eighteen years of age who have passed the road driving skills test after December 27, 2011 from 50 hours to 65 hours. Ten of the added hours will consist of nighttime driving, while the other five additional hours must be driven in poor weather conditions.

Changes to Junior Driver Passenger Restrictions: Act 81 places increased restrictions on the number and age of passengers which a junior driver license holder may transport. Current law limits drivers under the age of eighteen to transporting no more passengers than the number of seat belts in the vehicle. As of December 27, 2011, for the first six months after receiving a junior driver's license, a driver is not permitted to have more than one passenger under age eighteen who is not an immediate family member (brother, sister, stepbrother, stepsister of the junior driver and adopted or foster children living in the same household as the junior driver) in the vehicle unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. Anyone not convicted of a driving violation and who has not been partially or fully responsible for a reportable crash after six months may have up to three passengers under age eighteen who are not immediate family members without a parent or legal guardian present. Junior drivers with convictions or who are partially or fully responsible for a reportable crash during the first six months are once again restricted to one passenger.

Changes to Seat Belt Requirements: Drivers and occupants in a vehicle who are under the age of eighteen must wear properly adjusted and fastened seatbelts, and children under the age of eight must be securely fastened in a child restraint system. Failure to comply with the new law's seatbelt provisions is a primary offense, meaning that a driver can be pulled over and cited solely for that violation.