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Panhandle Public Health District Highlights Need for Increased Access to Driver's Education

Panhandle Public Health District (PPHD) is raising awareness about the need for increased access to driver's education in the Nebraska Panhandle, where teen participation rates remain significantly lower than the state average.

Only 20% of Panhandle teens complete a driver's education course, compared to approximately 50% statewide. This gap is concerning, as research shows driver's education significantly reduces crashes and traffic violations among young drivers.

According to the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), teen drivers ages 19 and younger were involved in 18% of all reported crashes statewide in 2023, despite making up a much smaller portion of licensed drivers. NDOT data also show teen drivers are disproportionately involved in nighttime, distracted-driving, and speed-related crashes.

Research conducted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln found that teens who completed a state-approved driver's education course were:

- 75% less likely to receive a traffic citation,
- 24% less likely to be involved in a fatal or injury crash, and
- 16% less likely to be involved in any crash during their first year of driving.

The study followed more than 150,000 Nebraska teen drivers and found that the safety benefits of driver's education continued beyond the first year of licensure, extending into young adulthood.

"Driver's education provides teens with critical skills, including defensive driving, hazard recognition, and safe decision-making," said, Janelle Visser, Injury Prevention Coordinator at Panhandle Public Health District. "Increasing access to these programs can improve safety for teens and for everyone who uses our roads."

Parents play a key role in teen driver safety. PPHD encourages parents to:

- Complete a brief parent survey at <https://tinyurl.com/4jcv2un2>
- Encourage teens to enroll in driver's education when available



- Model safe driving behaviors, including buckling up, slowing down, and avoiding distractions

To help address this issue, Panhandle Public Health District and the Nebraska Highway Safety Office are working together to raise awareness about teen driver safety and support increased access to driver's education. Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC) is also working to expand the availability of driver's education classes in the Panhandle. Current WNCC driver's education offerings are available at [WNCC Workforce & Lifelong Learning Events - 13 Upcoming Activities and Tickets | Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/wncc-workforce-lifelong-learning-events-13-upcoming-activities-and-tickets-tickets-153000311027)

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety and quality of life for all who live, learn, work and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle Community.