

# Young People

## Road crashes in South Australia, 2019-2023

### Overview

Even though significant road safety improvements have been achieved in recent years, younger road users continue to be over-represented in road trauma statistics. People aged 16 to 24 make up 11% of the population but accounted for 19% of all lives lost and 19% of all serious injuries in South Australia for the years 2019-2023. On average over the past five years (2019-2023), 19 people aged 16 to 24 were killed on our roads each year and 148 were seriously injured. This is a substantial improvement in comparison to the five-year average (2007-2011) where there were 29 lives lost and 291 serious injuries reported per year in this age group.

**Table 1: 16-24 years old casualties by severity, 2014-2023**

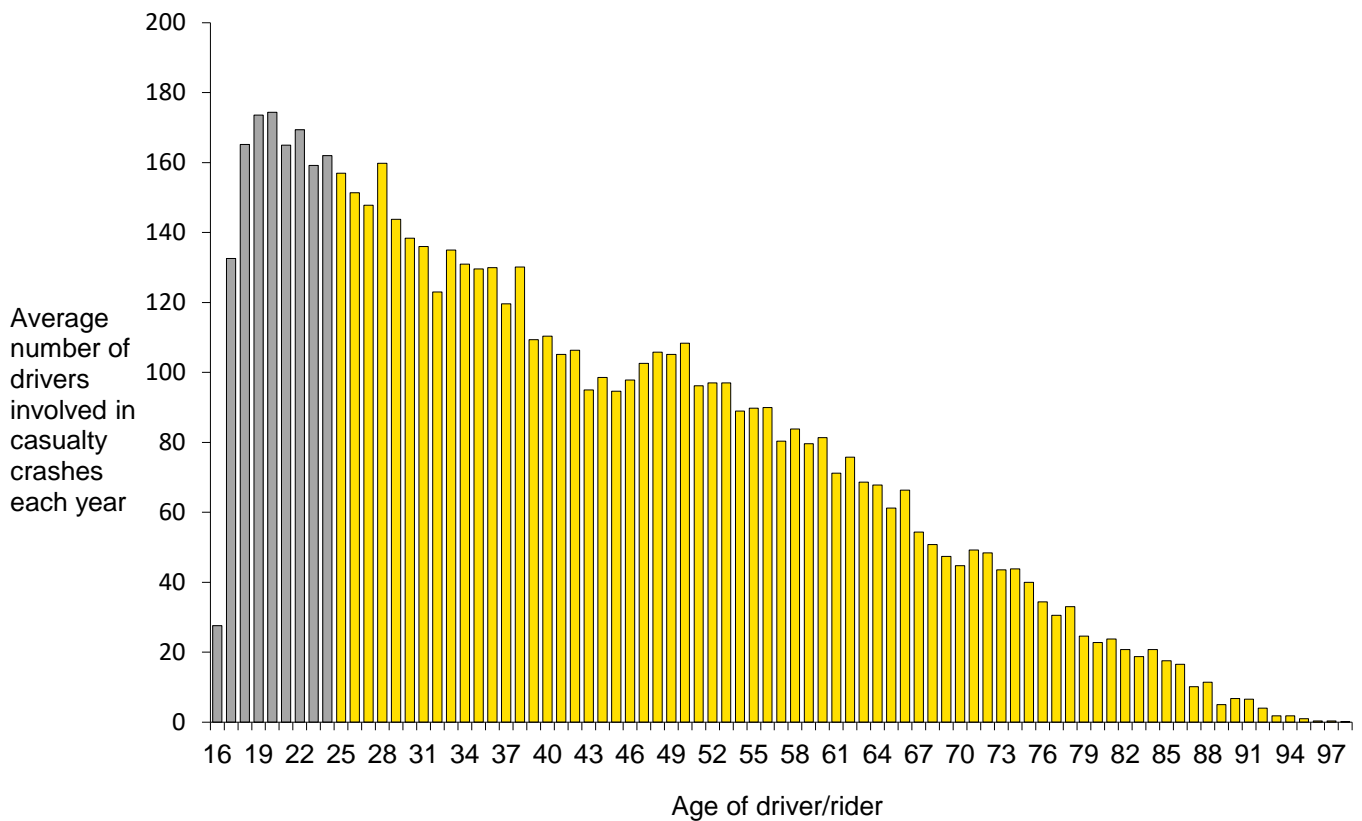
Year	Lives lost	Serious injuries	Minor injuries	Total
2014	17	170	1281	1468
2015	16	155	1212	1383
2016	15	167	1241	1423
2017	20	99	1068	1187
2018	17	111	1053	1181
2019	21	158	994	1173
2020	24	129	812	965
2021	19	185	933	1137
2022	16	120	688	824
2023	13	147	705	865
<b>Average % trend change</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>	<b>-6.8%</b>	<b>-6.0%</b>

Table 1 shows the number of lives lost, serious and minor injuries over the period from 2014 to 2023 for people aged 16 to 24. There has been a decrease in younger road user casualties over this period, driven by a decrease in minor injuries, yet the number of lives lost and serious injuries have only decreased slightly over the past 10 years.

- People aged 16 to 19 make up 5% of the population, and account for 9% of all lives lost and 8% of all serious injuries.
- People aged 20 to 24 make up 6% of the population but account for 10% of all lives lost and 11% of all serious injuries.

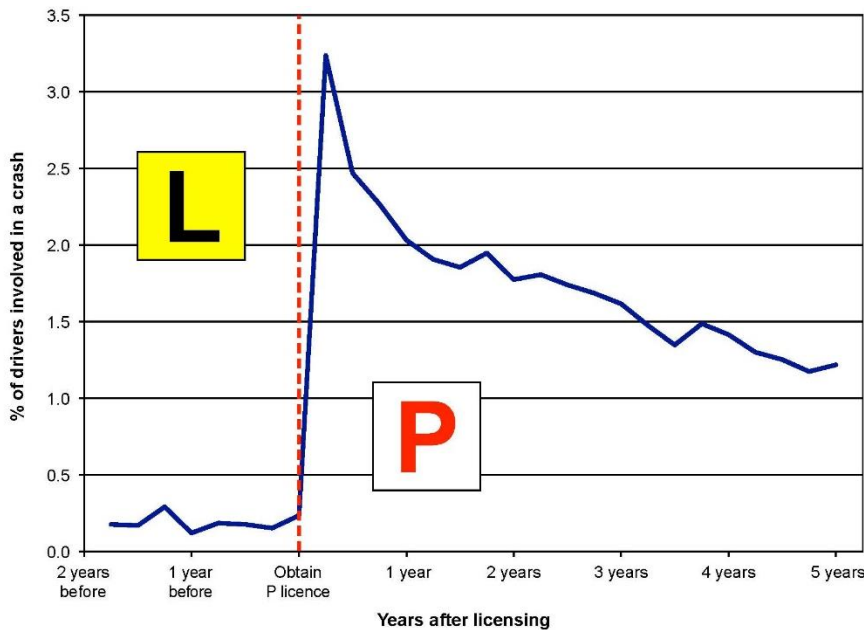
Figure 1 illustrates that on average drivers/riders aged 18 to 24 are involved in more casualty crashes than any other age group.

**Figure 1: Average number of drivers/riders involved in casualty crashes by age (16 years and over), 2019-2023**



Research shows that the human brains final stages of development, particularly for males, continues until around age 25. The prefrontal cortex, which governs reasoning, advanced thought and impulse control, is the final area of the human brain to mature but is a critical element in safe driving.

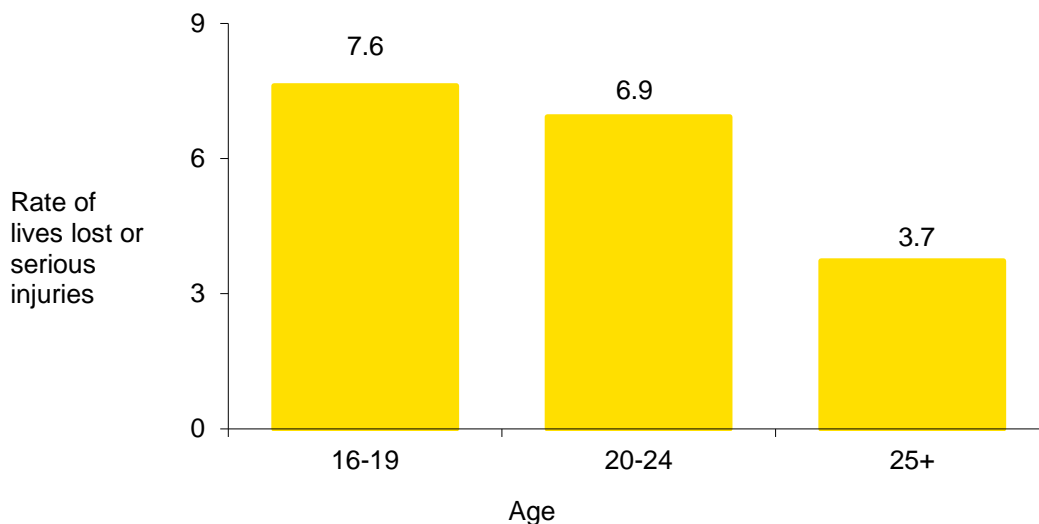
Figure 2: Percentage of SA drivers involved in a crash 5 years after licensing<sup>1</sup>



Young drivers in South Australia are more likely to crash in the first 12 months of holding a Provisional licence. Figure 2 shows very few drivers crash during the learner period, but the crash rate increases more than 10 times from the 3 months prior to obtaining a Provisional licence to the three months after gaining a P licence when they begin to drive unsupervised.

Figure 3 illustrates that young drivers aged 16 to 19 have a rate of 7.6 deaths or serious injuries for every 10,000 drivers licensed. This is around twice the rate of drivers aged 25 and above who have a rate of 3.7 lives lost or serious injuries per 10,000 licences held. Figure 3 also shows that drivers aged 20 to 24 years have a rate of 6.9 deaths or serious injuries for every 10,000 licences held.

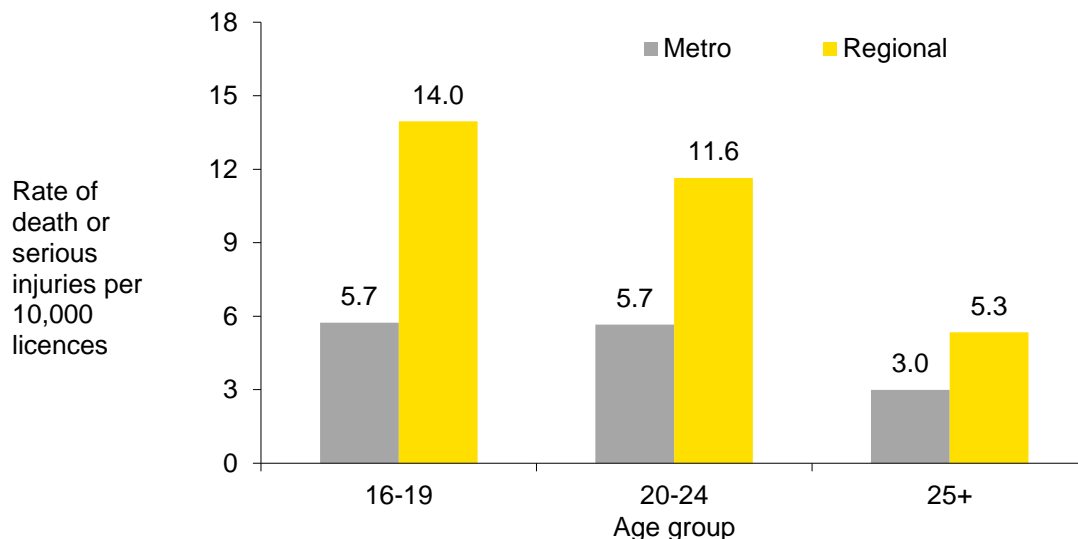
Figure 3: Rate of death or serious injuries per 10,000 licences for drivers/riders by age, 2019-2023



<sup>1</sup> The crash and offence experience of newly licensed young drivers in South Australia, Austroads, 2008

Young drivers and riders aged 16 to 19 living in regional South Australia are almost 2.5 times more likely, and those aged 20 to 24 are more than 2 times as likely to lose their life or be seriously injured in a crash, compared with people who reside in the Adelaide metropolitan area (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Rate of death or serious injuries per 10,000 licences held for drivers/riders by residence, 2019-2023**



Between 2008 and 2012, South Australia had the second worst fatality rate in the nation for 16 to 19 years olds with 16.0 deaths per 100,000 population. This rate improved to 6.2 for the 2013-2017 period but rose again for the most recent five-year period (2019-2023) to 10.0 deaths per 100,000 population (Table 2).

**Table 2: 16-19 years old lives lost per 100,000 population for 2019-2023 by jurisdiction<sup>2</sup>**

State	16-19 years old lives lost (Average)	16-19 years old population	16-19 years old lives lost rate
Vic	18	321,480	5.5
ACT	1	21,317	6.6
NSW	24	398,887	6.0
WA	10	137,651	7.4
Qld	24	274,902	8.9
SA	9	85,858	10.0
Tas	3	25,805	13.2
NT	2	12,580	14.3
Australia	91	1,278,480	7.1

<sup>2</sup> Life lost data sourced from the Australian Road Deaths Database as at 29 January 2024, population as of June 2023, ABS, cat 3101.0

**Table 3: Number of 16-24 years old lives lost and serious injuries by user type, 2019-2023**

User type	Lives lost		Serious injuries		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Drivers	44	47%	334	45%	378	45%
Passengers	16	17%	129	17%	145	17%
Motorcyclists <sup>^</sup>	27	29%	201	27%	228	27%
Cyclists	0	0%	25	3%	25	3%
Pedestrians <sup>^^</sup>	6	6%	46	6%	52	6%
Other <sup>^^^</sup>	0	0%	4	0%	4	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>739</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>832</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Notes:**

<sup>^</sup>Motorcyclists include scooter operators and pillion passengers.

<sup>^^</sup>Pedestrians include gopher and wheelchair users.

<sup>^^^</sup>Personal mobility device (PMD) is included in 'other' road user types.

Most lives lost and serious injuries in the 16-24 years old age group are vehicle drivers followed by motorcyclists. Younger age groups (16-24 years old) have a lower representation in cyclists and pedestrian lives lost and serious injuries (Table 3). However, the 16-24 years age group has a higher proportion of motorcycle crashes (27%) of lives lost and serious injuries (Table 3), compared to 23% for aged 25 and over motorcyclists.

Research has shown that younger drivers, particularly males, exhibit certain attributes that contribute to their higher risk of road crashes. These include:

- a greater inclination for risk taking
- the use of older vehicles with fewer safety features
- a greater susceptibility to inappropriate peer pressure and other driver distractions such as mobile phones
- driving too fast for the road conditions
- running red lights
- not allowing appropriate space between vehicles.

In keeping with best practice internationally and interstate, South Australia manages these risks through a Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS) that supports drivers in gaining appropriate experience at an appropriate age. On 28 July 2014, new rules were introduced for South Australian novice licence holders aged under 25.

More information about the GLS rules can be found at the [My Licence website](#)

Between 2019 and 2023 drivers/riders in the 16-24 years age group:

- 19% of drivers/riders killed and tested for blood alcohol concentration (BAC) recorded a BAC of 0.05 or above.
- 26% tested positive for the presence of cannabis, methamphetamine or ecstasy or a combination of these drugs.
- 43% of the drivers and passengers killed were unrestrained.
- 74% of drivers/riders killed or seriously injured were male.
- 42% of drivers/riders were killed or seriously injured on regional roads.
- 46% of drivers/riders were killed or seriously injured on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday.
- 56% of drivers/riders were killed or seriously injured on roads signposted as 80km/h or above.

**Definitions of police reported casualty types:**

**Casualty crash** – crash where at least one life is lost, serious injury or minor injury occurs.

**Casualty** – A life lost, serious injury or minor injury.

**Fatal crash** – A crash for which there is at least one life lost.

**Life lost** – A person who dies within 30 days of a crash as a result of injuries sustained in that crash.

**Serious injury crash** – A non-fatal crash in which at least one person is seriously injured.

**Serious injury** – A person who sustains injuries and is admitted to hospital for a minimum period of an overnight stay as a result of a road crash and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor injury crash** – A crash in which at least one person sustains injury but no person is seriously injured or dies within 30 days of the crash.

**Minor injury** – A person who sustains injuries that require medical treatment, either by a doctor or in a hospital, as a result of a road crash and who was not admitted to hospital and who does not die as a result of those injuries within 30 days of the crash.

**Data sources**

The data presented in this report was obtained from the Department for Infrastructure and Transport Road Crash Database. The information was compiled from police reported road casualty crashes only.

**Note** – Percentage totals may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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