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Study: Hawaii 10th In Teen Traffic Deaths

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HONOLULU -- A new national study shows Hawaii is 10th on the list of 20 states where teen traffic fatalities are on the rise.

The information comes just as police and emergency room doctors are gearing up for a busy 4th of July weekend.

It's a tragic reminder of young lives cut short. Last month, a carload of five teenagers flipped over in Waialua, killing two Waialua High School seniors.

One of them was Shane Bachiller, 18, who just hours earlier celebrated his birthday.

Now a new study by a physicians lead by the traffic safety group and the National Safety Council said traffic deaths in Hawaii involving at least one 16- to 20-year-old driver is on the rise.

The report said that from 1994 to 2004, teen-related traffic fatalities increased 49 percent.

The Honolulu Police Department reported that so far this year on O'ahu there have been 51 traffic deaths. Eight of them, or 16 percent, were youth-related.

"I think it's a really high-risk group," Dr. Howard Klemmer said.

Klemmer has worked in the Queen's Medical Center's emergency room for eight years.

"We see a lot of bad accidents related to speeding, drugs and alcohol. It's often tragic," Klemmer said.

ER doctors see a long list of injuries, including ones where the victim had been thrown, which is what happened to Bachiller.

Klemmer said the most tragic accidents are the ones that could have been prevented.

"It's very difficult for a parent to understand why their child is dead and they're still alive, and it's really hard to swallow and accept," Klemmer said.

With the 4th of July holiday around the corner, the Department of Transportation is emphasizing safe driving and has a different take on the new study. It said that programs like Click-It-or-Ticket helped lead to a 7 percent decrease in teen traffic deaths statewide between 1995 and 2005.

The state also said that new programs like graduated licensing should help.

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