



NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
May 29, 2008

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GOV. RELL TO PARENTS: PUT SAFETY FIRST THIS PROM AND GRADUATION SEASON *The Governor's Prevention Partnership Offers Parents 10 Tips for a Safe Celebration*

Gov. M. Jodi Rell is encouraging parents to put safety at the top of their checklist this prom and graduation season, the last before stiffer teen driver restrictions go into effect. Proms, graduations and end-of-school-year parties usher in the riskiest period of the year for teen accidents and underage drinking.

“Parents understandably want to give their teens a special prom and graduation,” Rell said. “Safety is the most important gift we can give our children. As parents, it is also our responsibility. We have strengthened teen driving and underage drinking laws to prevent more senseless tragedies that led to these changes. But parents need to hold up their part of the equation.”

“Mindful of the heightened risks and temptations that proms and graduation bring, I encourage parents to continue the conversations we started April 17 with Talk to Teen Drivers Night. Add to our laws the weight of your expectations that teens should not be drinking or ignoring the rules of the road. Model these expectations by not serving alcohol to teens. Not only is it the law; it’s the right thing to do. Let these milestones be joyous occasions, memorable for all the right reasons.”

The tragic wave of motor vehicle accidents last year and into the early part of this year prompted Gov. Rell to push for stricter driving laws for new teen drivers. In 2006, she signed a house party law making it illegal for parents and other adults to host or enable parties on their property where youth under 21 are drinking.

Nearly one-third of youth under 21 killed in traffic crashes died in alcohol-related crashes during April, May, and June, prom and graduation season, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Additionally, the 2005 Connecticut School Health Survey found that by the time Connecticut teenagers are seniors in high school, almost 75 percent have consumed an alcohol drink. One in 10 high school students reported driving after having consumed alcohol sometime in the past month while 30 percent rode with a driver who had been drinking.

“Being involved and asking questions puts teens on alert that there are rules and consequences,” said Jill Spinetti, president and CEO of The Governor’s Prevention Partnership. “Let them know calmly and reasonably that as a parent, their safety is your number one priority.”

The Partnership, co-chaired by Gov. Rell, was a pivotal force in passing the state’s social host law which states that adults who hold house parties where underage drinking occurs can face fines and/or jail time.

Beginning Aug. 1, drivers under age 18 will face tougher passenger restrictions and penalties under the new teen driving law spearheaded by Gov. Rell. Additional provisions include an earlier curfew and mandatory classes for parents on teen driving laws.

1. Know your teen's complete itinerary for the evening, including who they will be with and phone numbers where they can be contacted. Let it be understood there are no deviations without prior approval.
2. Discuss with your teen his or her school's proms and graduation rules regarding alcohol and the consequences for violating them.
3. Determine a fair curfew based on your teen's history of responsibility.
4. Take stock of all the alcohol and prescription drugs in your home.
5. Do not rent hotel rooms for the after-party. If you suspect your child has booked a room, call local hotels and check for their reservation.
6. Communicate with other parents and school officials.
7. Know who is driving and ensure the driver will remain sober for the entire evening. Reinforce safe driving rules including seatbelt use and no talking on a cell phone while driving.
8. Establish a couple of mandatory check-in times such as right after the prom, arrival at the after-party location and on their way home.
9. Agree that your child can call you at any time for help or advice and that you will pick them up if needed, no questions asked that night. Create a code word that your child can use to indicate that they need your assistance.
10. Refuse to supply alcohol to youth; make sure that alcohol is not brought into your home or onto your property by your child's friends.

The Governor's Prevention Partnership is a not-for-profit collaboration of state and business leaders dedicated to developing and strengthening prevention programs that keep Connecticut youth safe, successful and drug-free. The Partnership is the only statewide organization focusing exclusively on prevention with major partners including the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Travelers, and Webster Bank.

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