TOPEKA – The risk of a serious or even fatal crash increases significantly with every teen passenger who enters a novice driver’s car. That’s why the Kansas Department of Transportation is participating in the 2008 National Teen Driver Safety Week campaign, October 19 – 25, and its focus on eliminating teen driver distractions.

A study provided by Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, one of the national sponsors of Teen Driver Safety Week, shows that the risk of a fatal crash for a teen driver increases exponentially with each teen passenger. In fact, the risk of being involved in a fatal crash nearly doubles for a novice driver when there is just one other teen passenger. With 3 or more passengers, that risk quadruples versus driving alone.

“Teens simply aren’t experienced enough to handle all of the distractions associated with additional passengers,” said KDOT Secretary Deb Miller. “One way to eliminate many of the teen deaths and injuries in Kansas would be to pass a comprehensive graduated drivers license bill, limiting the number of passengers in those first crucial months of driving.”

Because motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for people ages 15 to 18, National Teen Driver Safety Week activities are designed to bring teens, community leaders, educators and parents together to help prevent teen crashes and injuries.

Every day, drivers must multitask behind the wheel by constantly observing other drivers, road conditions and road signs. Cell phones, arguing over music choices, or any other kind of distracting behavior can divert the driver’s attention away from the road and dramatically increase the risk of a crash.

In Kansas, 47 teens died in motor vehicle crashes during 2007, and 35 (74 percent) of those were not using seat belts. On the other hand, 91 percent of teens who came out of crashes unharmed were wearing seat belts. The best defense in reducing injury or death in a crash is to wear your seat belt.

For more information, please visit www.ksdot.org