

Minnesota Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Summary

Minn. Stat. §§ 169.475, 171.04, 171.041, 171.05, 171.055, 171.27

HOUSE RESEARCH

Minnesota licenses young drivers using a graduated driver licensing (GDL) system in which some aspects of driving privileges are limited until the driver gains experience. Like almost all other states, driver requirements and restrictions under the GDL system have expanded in recent years. The system is divided into three basic stages: (1) learner’s permit, which always requires the presence of a licensed driver; (2) provisional licensure, which is an intermediate stage that allows unsupervised driving but carries various limitations (particularly on passengers, nighttime driving, and use of electronic devices); and (3) full licensure.

The table below outlines each GDL stage. It identifies for each type of license the prerequisites for initial issuance (not renewal), driver accompaniment, and restrictions that apply when operating a vehicle under that license. The table does not address scenarios for license renewal, a person who is previously licensed in another state, or endorsements and commercial licenses.¹

	Instruction Permit →	Provisional License →	Full License	Farm Work License
Description	Initial permit for learning to drive	Restricted license for minors	Regular, unrestricted driver’s license	Restricted provisional license for minors to assist in farm work ⁱ
Qualifications to Obtain License				
<i>Minimum age</i>	15	16	17 ⁱⁱ	15
<i>Minimum holding period (duration of previous GDL stage)</i>	None	Held instruction permit and/or farm work license for 6 months	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held provisional license for preceding 12 months If age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held instruction permit for 6 months If age 19 or over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held instruction permit for 3 months 	Held instruction permit, with no minimum length of time

¹ The table also does not include public safety prerequisites applicable to all permit and license applicants, including: license not revoked until proof of insurance is provided; person not legally incompetent; person not drug-dependent; person not deemed inimical to public safety; person has no physical or mental disability that prevents ordinary control over the vehicle; person is able to understand traffic signs; and license is not suspended or canceled. Minn. Stat. § 171.04, subd. 1.

	Instruction Permit	Provisional License	Full License	Farm Work License
<i>Minimum supervised driving practice</i>	None	At least 30 hours under instruction permit, at least 10 of which at night	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 10 hours under provisional license If age 18 or older: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None required 	None
<i>Driver's education</i>	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently taking driver's education and completed classroom portion If age 18 or over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None required 	Completed driver's education	None required (see provisional license requirements)	Completed driver's education
<i>Examinations</i>	Written exam Eye exam	If held instruction permit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road exam Note: written and eye exams are part of instruction permit requirements If held farm work license: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None required Note: written, eye, and road exams are part of previous requirements 	If held provisional license: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None required Note: written, eye, and road exams are part of previous requirements If age 18 or over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Road exam Note: written and eye exams are part of instruction permit requirements 	Road exam Note: written and eye exams are part of instruction permit requirements
<i>Driving and criminal history</i>	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No past conviction for: (1) certain alcohol violationsⁱⁱⁱ, or (2) crash-related moving violations (with such convictions the person must wait until age 18 to get an instruction permit) If age 18 or over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No prerequisites 	No conviction in past 6 months for: (1) certain alcohol violations ⁱⁱⁱ , (2) crash-related moving violations, or (3) noncrash-related moving violations ^{iv}	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No conviction in past 12 months for: (1) certain alcohol violationsⁱⁱⁱ, (2) crash-related moving violations, or (3) more than one noncrash-related moving violation If age 18 or over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No prerequisites 	No conviction in past 6 months for: (1) certain alcohol violations ⁱⁱⁱ , (2) crash-related moving violations, or (3) noncrash-related moving violations ^{iv}

	Instruction Permit →	Provisional License →	Full License	Farm Work License
<i>Other steps</i>	Parental approval Application and fee	Parental approval Application and fee	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental approval All: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application and fee 	Parental approval Application and fee Farm work affidavit Property tax statement or rental agreement for agricultural property
Driver Accompaniment	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/guardian or licensed driver age 21 or older in passenger seat If age 18 or over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult licensed driver in passenger seat 	None required	None required	If driving only to perform farm work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None required Otherwise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent/guardian or licensed driver age 21 or older in passenger seat
Restrictions				
<i>Driver use of electronic devices</i>	If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No cell phone use All: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No messaging device use 	No cell phone use No messaging device use	No messaging device use	No cell phone use No messaging device use
<i>Passengers</i>	No restrictions Note: driver must always be accompanied	If unaccompanied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For first 6 months: up to 1 passenger under age 20 • For second 6 months: up to 3 passengers under age 20 • Note: restrictions exclude immediate family members If accompanied by parent/guardian: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No restrictions 	No restrictions	If unaccompanied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None If accompanied (see Driver Accompaniment): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No restrictions

	Instruction Permit	Provisional License	Full License	Farm Work License
<i>Nighttime driving</i>	No restrictions Note: driver must always be accompanied	For first 6 months, no operation 12am to 5am unless: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driving between home and work or certain school events • Driving as part of work • Accompanied by licensed driver at least age 25 	No restrictions	If unaccompanied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operation only during daylight hours If accompanied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No restrictions
<i>Other restrictions</i>	No other restrictions	No other restrictions	No other restrictions	If unaccompanied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must drive only to perform farm work • Operation only within 20 miles of parent / guardian's farmhouse • No operation within cities of the first class If accompanied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No other restrictions
Expiration	2 years	2 years	Earlier of 4 years or at age 21 ^v	2 years

Notes

- ⁱ It is treated as a hybrid between an instruction permit and provisional license. It works like a provisional license but with additional restrictions to allow the person to drive unaccompanied to perform farm work.
- ⁱⁱ Age is not specified in statute, but a full license is available at age 17 if all qualifications are met.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Alcohol violations include: DWI, underage drinking and driving, open container law, and implied consent law. Minn. Stat. §§ 169A.20, 169A.33, 169A.35, 169A.50 to 169A.53.
- ^{iv} Also, license is not issued if an alcohol or moving violation occurred when the person did not possess an instruction permit. Minn. Stat. § 171.055, subd. 1 (c).
- ^v License expires on 21st birthday. Minn. Stat. § 171.27.