

# Minnesota Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Summary

Minn. Stat. §§ 169.475, 171.04, 171.041, 171.05, 171.055, 171.06, 171.061, 171.27

HOUSE RESEARCH

Minnesota, like almost all other states, licenses new drivers using a graduated driver licensing (GDL) system in which some aspects of driving privileges are limited until the driver gains experience. The system is mainly 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 for youth drivers that allows unsupervised driving but carries various limitations (particularly on passengers, nighttime driving, and use of electronic devices); and (3) **full licensure**. There is also a less common farm work license for farm-related driving situations (as well as a medical license, which is not discussed in this summary).

The table below outlines each GDL stage. It identifies the prerequisites for initial issuance of each permit or license, driver accompaniment, and restrictions that apply when operating a vehicle. The table does not address scenarios for license renewal, reinstatement of lost driving privileges, previous licensing in another state, enhanced licenses, or endorsements and commercial licenses, and does not include public safety prerequisites generally applicable to everyone.<sup>1</sup>

| Feature                               | (1) Instruction Permit                         | Farm Work License  | (2) Provisional License                                       | (3) Full License (Under 21)   |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Description</b>                    | Initial permit for beginning to learn to drive | Specialized provisional license for minors to assist in farm work <sup>i</sup> | Restricted license for minors                                 | Regular, unrestricted driver’s license  |
| <b>Prerequisites</b>                  |  |  |   |   |
| <i>Minimum age</i>                    | 15   | 15   | 16  | 17 <sup>ii</sup>  |
| <i>Duration of previous GDL stage</i> | None   | Held instruction permit, with no minimum length of time                        | Held instruction permit and/or farm work license for 6 months | If under age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held provisional license for preceding 12 months</li> </ul> If age 18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held instruction permit for 6 months</li> </ul> If age 19 or over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held instruction permit for 3 months</li> </ul> |

<sup>1</sup> General prerequisites include: person not legally incompetent; person not drug-dependent; person not 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, revoked, or canceled. Minn. Stat. § 171.04, subd. 1.

| Feature   | (1) Instruction Permit   | Farm Work License  | (2) Provisional License  | (3) Full License (Under 21)  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <i>Minimum supervised driving time</i> <sup>iii</sup> | None required  | At least 50 hours (or 40 hours if supplemental parental curriculum completed), of which at least 15 hours must be at night <sup>iv</sup>   | At least 50 hours (or 40 hours if supplemental parental curriculum completed), of which at least 15 hours must be at night <sup>iv</sup>   | If under age 18:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 10 hours with provisional license</li> </ul> If age 18 or older:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None required</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Driver's education</i>                             | If under age 18:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently enrolled in driver's education</li> <li>• Completed (1) classroom portion, or (2) 15 hours of classroom in a program that provides classroom and behind-the-wheel concurrently</li> </ul> If age 18 or over:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None required</li> </ul> | Completed driver's education   | Completed driver's education   | None required (but may have been in a previous GDL stage)  |
| <i>Examinations</i>                                   | Written exam<br><br>Eye exam   | Road exam<br><br>Eye exam  | If holding instruction permit:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road exam</li> <li>• Eye exam</li> </ul> If holding farm work license:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eye exam</li> </ul>  | If holding provisional license:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eye exam</li> </ul> If age 18 or over:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Road exam</li> <li>• Eye exam</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Violations history</i>                             | If under age 18:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have no convictions<sup>v</sup> at any point in time for (1) certain alcohol violations<sup>vi</sup>, or (2) crash-related moving violations</li> </ul> If age 18 or over:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No prerequisites</li> </ul>  | Have no convictions in past 6 months for (1) certain alcohol violations <sup>vi</sup> , (2) crash-related moving violations, or (3) noncrash-related moving violations<br><br>Have no convictions <sup>v</sup> while not in possession of an instruction permit, at any point in time, for (1) certain alcohol violations <sup>vi</sup> , or (2) crash-related moving violations | Have no convictions in past 6 months for (1) certain alcohol violations <sup>vi</sup> , (2) crash-related moving violations, or (3) noncrash-related moving violations<br><br>Have no convictions <sup>v</sup> while not in possession of an instruction permit, at any point in time, for (1) certain alcohol violations <sup>vi</sup> , or (2) crash-related moving violations | If under age 18:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have no conviction in past 12 months for (1) certain alcohol violations<sup>vi</sup>, (2) crash-related moving violations, or (3) more than one noncrash-related moving violation</li> </ul> If age 18 or over:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No prerequisites</li> </ul> |

| Feature                                 | (1) Instruction Permit   | Farm Work License   | (2) Provisional License  | (3) Full License (Under 21)   |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| <i>Other steps</i>                      | Parental approval<br><br>Application and fees (totaling \$14.25) <sup>vii</sup>  | Parental approval<br><br>Application and fees (totaling \$17.25) <sup>vii</sup><br><br>Signed supervised driving log <sup>viii</sup><br><br>Farm work affidavit<br><br>Property tax statement or rental agreement for agricultural land                 | Parental approval<br><br>Application and fees (totaling \$17.25) <sup>vii</sup><br><br>Signed supervised driving log <sup>viii</sup>   | If under age 18:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental approval</li> </ul> All:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application and fees (totaling \$26.25)<sup>vii</sup></li> </ul> |
| <b>Accompaniment While Driving</b>      | If under age 18:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent/guardian or licensed driver age 21 or older in front passenger seat</li> </ul> If age 18 or over:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult licensed driver in front passenger seat</li> </ul> | If driving only to perform farm work:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None required</li> </ul> Otherwise:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent/guardian or licensed driver age 21 or older in front passenger seat</li> </ul> | None required  | None required   |
| <b>Restrictions</b>                     |  |   |  |   |
| <i>Passengers</i>                       | No restrictions<br><br>Note: driver must always be accompanied (see Accompaniment While Driving)   | If unaccompanied:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No passengers</li> </ul> If accompanied by parent/guardian:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No restrictions</li> </ul>  | If unaccompanied:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For first 6 months: up to 1 passenger under age 20</li> <li>• For second 6 months: up to 3 passengers under age 20</li> <li>• Note: restrictions exclude immediate family members</li> </ul> If accompanied by parent/guardian:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No restrictions</li> </ul> | No restrictions   |
| <i>Driver use of electronic devices</i> | If under age 18:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No cell phone use</li> </ul> All:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No messaging device use</li> </ul>  | No cell phone use<br><br>No messaging device use  | No cell phone use<br><br>No messaging device use   | No messaging device use   |

| Feature                   | (1) Instruction Permit   | Farm Work License  | (2) Provisional License  | (3) Full License (Under 21)     |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|---------------------------------|
| <i>Nighttime driving</i>  | No restrictions<br><br>Note: driver must always be accompanied (see Accompaniment While Driving) | If unaccompanied:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operation only during daylight hours</li> </ul> If accompanied by parent/guardian:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No restrictions</li> </ul>  | For first 6 months, no operation 12 a.m. to 5 a.m. unless:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driving between home and work or certain school events;</li> <li>• Driving as part of work; or</li> <li>• Accompanied by licensed driver at least age 25</li> </ul> Otherwise:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No restrictions</li> </ul> | No restrictions                 |
| <i>Other restrictions</i> | No other restrictions  | If unaccompanied:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must drive only to perform farm work</li> <li>• Operation only within 20 miles of parent/guardian's farmhouse</li> <li>• No operation within cities of the first class</li> </ul> If accompanied:<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No other restrictions</li> </ul> | No other restrictions  | No other restrictions           |
| <b>Expiration</b>         | 2 years  | 2 years  | 2 years  | Earlier of 4 years or at age 21 |

**Notes**

- <sup>i</sup> A farm work license is treated as a hybrid between an instruction permit and provisional license. It allows driving unaccompanied only when performing farm work.
- <sup>ii</sup> Age is not specified in statute, but a full license could be obtained at age 17 if all qualifications are met.
- <sup>iii</sup> Driving supervisor must be a licensed driver who is age 21 or older. Minn. Stat. §§ 171.04, subd. 1 (1)(iii); 171.055, subd. 1 (a)(5)(i).
- <sup>iv</sup> Hours requirements are effective January 1, 2015. Prior to that date, the requirements are a minimum of 30 hours driving, of which at least 10 must be at night.
- <sup>v</sup> If convicted for any of the listed offenses, the person cannot obtain driving privileges until age 18. Minn. Stat. §§ 171.05, subd. 1b; 171.055, subd. 1 (c).
- <sup>vi</sup> 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.
- <sup>vii</sup> Amount includes technology surcharge and filing fee, and excludes any endorsements. Minn. Stat. §§ 171.06, subd. 2; 171.061, subd. 4.
- <sup>viii</sup> A signed supervised driving log is required effective January 1, 2015. Minn. Stat. § 171.055, subd. 1 (a)(5).