



Impaired Driving

KEY POINTS

- Impaired driving happens when someone operates a vehicle while impaired by substances such as marijuana, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, and/or alcohol.
- Driving while impaired by any substance is dangerous and illegal.
- There are effective measures that can help prevent injuries and deaths from impaired driving.

Effects of substances on driving

Safe driving requires focus, coordination, good judgment, and quick reactions to the environment. Any alcohol or [other drug](#) use impairs the ability to drive safely.

The amount of alcohol in a person's system can be measured. This measurement is called blood alcohol concentration (BAC). Most states have set the legal BAC limit for driving at 0.08 grams of alcohol per deciliter (g/dL); the limit is 0.05 g/dL in Utah. [\[1\]](#) However, impairment starts at lower BAC levels. Information on the effects of alcohol on driving at a range of BACs is available [here](#).

We know a lot about alcohol's effects on driving, but more research is needed to fully understand the impact of drugs on driving skills. [\[2\]](#) However, research has shown that both legal and illicit drugs impair the skills needed to drive safely. For example:

- Some of the effects of being impaired by [marijuana](#) that can affect driving include slowed reaction time and decision making, impaired coordination, and distorted perception. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#)
- Other drugs (such as cocaine or illicit amphetamines) can also impair skills like perception, memory, and attention in the short or long term. [\[2\]](#)
- Prescription and over-the-counter medications can cause many side effects that can impact driving, such as sleepiness, impaired vision, and impaired coordination. [\[6\]](#)
- Use of multiple substances (such as marijuana and alcohol) at the same time can increase impairment. [\[5\]](#) [\[7\]](#)

Impacts

In 2020, 11,654 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes involving alcohol-impaired drivers, accounting for 30% of all traffic-related deaths in the United States. [\[8\]](#)

32 people in the United States are killed every day in crashes involving an alcohol-impaired driver — this is one death every 45 minutes. [\[8\]](#)

It is not known how many people are killed each year in crashes involving drug-impaired drivers because of data limitations. [\[9\]](#) Regardless, driving while impaired by any substance is dangerous and illegal.

Keep Reading: [Impaired Driving Facts](#)

People at increased risk

Some groups are more at risk for impaired driving and related crashes and deaths. These include teen drivers and passengers, [\[10\]](#) young adult drivers, men, and drivers who don't always wear a seat belt. [\[8\]](#)

Keep Reading: [People at Increased Risk for Impaired Driving](#)

What the research shows

There are multiple effective measures that states and communities can take to prevent alcohol-impaired driving. These include actively implementing and enforcing lower BAC limits [\[11\]](#) and implementing sobriety checkpoints. [\[12\]](#)

Keep Reading: [Preventing Impaired Driving](#)

What you can do


For **drivers**: Plan ahead. If you plan to drink alcohol or use drugs, make plans so that you do not have to drive.

For **everyone**: Don't let your friends drive while impaired by alcohol and/or drugs. If you're hosting a party where alcohol or drugs will be available, remind your guests to plan ahead.






Keep Reading: [What You Can Do to Prevent Impaired Driving](#)

Resources

Drug-impaired driving fact sheet

The [drug-impaired driving fact sheet](#)  provides an overview of drug-impaired driving. This fact sheet highlights strategies that states can use to address drug-impaired driving and identifies actions that can be taken.

Additional resources












- [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety \(IIHS\): Alcohol and drugs](#) 
- [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\): Drunk Driving](#) 
- [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\): Drug-Impaired Driving](#) 
- [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration \(NHTSA\). Countermeasures That Work: A Highway Safety Countermeasures Guide for State Highway Safety Offices, Eleventh Edition, 2023](#) 
- [The Community Preventive Services Task Force \(CPSTF\) Findings for Motor Vehicle Injury](#) 




SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:

[National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#)

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