

DRUG-IMPAIRED DRIVING

IN THE UNITED STATES



12.6 MILLION

Americans reported driving under the influence of marijuana or other illicit drugs in 2018.¹

Driving while impaired is illegal in the United States. Impaired driving happens when someone operates a vehicle while impaired by a substance like marijuana, other illicit drugs, some prescribed or over-the-counter medicines, or alcohol. Polysubstance use (using more than one drug or using drugs and alcohol together) also makes driving dangerous.

WHAT WE KNOW

Driving while impaired by any substance can be deadly. We know a lot about alcohol's effects on driving.* However, we need more research to fully understand the impacts of drug use and polysubstance use on crash injuries and deaths. One research challenge is distinguishing between **presence of** drugs and **impairment by** drugs in the body.

Driving while impaired by any substance can be deadly.



Marijuana



Other Illicit Drugs



Prescription and Over-the-Counter Meds



Alcohol

* This fact sheet focuses on drug-impaired driving. For information about alcohol-impaired driving, please visit www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving.



Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention
National Center for Injury
Prevention and Control

Working together, we can help keep people safe on the road—every day.

Promising Strategies to Help Address Drug-Impaired Driving

Strategies to address alcohol-impaired driving are well known. Less is known about effective strategies to reduce drug- and polysubstance-impaired driving. See the examples below of roadside strategies that states are using to address drug-impaired driving.

Short-Term High-Visibility Enforcement of Impaired Driving Laws

Short-term high-visibility enforcement (HVE) of impaired driving laws involves a brief period of increased police efforts, including sobriety checkpoints or saturation patrols (an increased number of officers patrolling a specific area). An effective HVE approach combines law enforcement with paid and earned media to increase awareness of the effort.²



By the Numbers

Publicized sobriety checkpoints are authorized in 38 states and Washington, D.C., as of February 2020.^{2,3}

Drug Recognition Experts

Drug recognition experts (DREs) are law enforcement officers trained to identify drug-impaired driving using a 12-step, standardized evaluation that includes behavioral tests and physical assessments.⁴

The DRE evaluation includes breath alcohol testing, eye exams, muscle tone exams, tests such as the One Leg Stand, and other behavioral and physical observations.^{4,5} Blood or urine samples are collected and analyzed if there is sufficient evidence that a driver is impaired by a drug other than or in addition to alcohol.⁴



By the Numbers

As of December 2019, there were 9,878 certified DREs active throughout all 50 states and Washington, D.C. In 2019, states reported 49,905 DRE evaluations.⁶



NEXT STEPS FOR ADDRESSING DRUG-IMPAIRED DRIVING

Actions that could advance understanding of drug and polysubstance-impaired driving and assist states and communities with prevention efforts include:

- development, evaluation, and further implementation of strategies to prevent alcohol, drug, and polysubstance-impaired driving.
- standardized testing for alcohol and drugs among impaired drivers and drivers involved in fatal crashes. Adequate resources for toxicology laboratories are required for such testing.

REFERENCES

1. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2019). 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Rockville, MD.
2. Richard, C. M., Magee, K., Bacon-Abdelmoteleb, P., & Brown, J. L. (2018, April). Countermeasures that work: A highway safety countermeasure guide for State Highway Safety Offices, Ninth edition (Report No. DOT HS 812 478). https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/documents/812478_countermeasures-that-work-a-highway-safety-countermeasures-guide.pdf. Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
3. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. (2020, February). Alcohol and drugs. Retrieved from <https://www.iihs.org/topics/alcohol-and-drugs>.
4. Hedlund, J. (2017, April). Drug-Impaired Driving: A guide for what states can do (Rep.). Retrieved from <https://www.ghsa.org/sites/default/files/2016-11/Drug-Impaired%20Driving-%20A%20Guide%20For%20What%20States%20Can%20Do-Interactive.pdf>.
5. International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2019). The 12-Step DRE Protocol. Retrieved from <https://www.theiacp.org/12-step-process>.
6. International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2020). IACP Drug Evaluation & Classification Program: 2019 Annual Report (Rep.). Retrieved from <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/2019%20DECP%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

For more information about impaired driving, visit www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving.