

Impaired Driving



What Is Impaired Driving?

Impaired driving happens when a person operates a vehicle while under the influence of a drug. Substance use can negatively impact the skills necessary to operate a vehicle.

Is Impaired Driving Dangerous?

Yes. Driving while impaired by any substance - whether legal or illegal - endangers the driver, their passengers and other pedestrians on the street. About 37 people in the United States die in impaired driving-related crashes each day.

Safe driving requires sound judgment, focus, quick reaction time, and coordination. The use of alcohol or other drugs diminishes these essential abilities, increasing the likelihood of accidents.

Is Impaired Driving Illegal?

Yes. It is illegal to drive while impaired by any substance - both illegal and legal - anywhere within the United States. Law enforcement officers are trained to monitor driver behavior and identify those who appear impaired. There is a common misconception that since marijuana has been legalized for recreational use in some states, that it is legal to drive while under the influence of this drug. This is false.

What Substances Are Used The Most When Driving?

Alcohol is the most common used substance that effects drivers behind the wheel. The second most used is marijuana.

- **Driving while impaired by any substance - whether legal or illegal - is against the law.**
- **Alcohol, illegal drugs and some over-the-counter and prescription drugs can cause impaired driving.**
- **If a person is using an impairing substance, they should have a designated driver, call a cab or use a ride-share service.**

What Substances Cause Impaired Driving?

Alcohol, Marijuana and Other Drugs

Can impair coordination and decision-making skills, distort perception, reduce judgment of time and distance and slow down reaction time. Alcohol and marijuana are the most common substances used while a person is driving.

Cocaine and Methamphetamine

Can impair perception, attention and memory in both the short and long term. They can also make drivers act more aggressive and reckless.

Some Prescription and Over-The-Counter Medicines

Can cause drowsiness, dizziness, impaired memory, and reduced thinking skills. Read and follow all labels on these medications, as there may be a warning about operating heavy machinery (such as driving a car) while taking the medication.

Two or More Drugs Used Simultaneously

Can amplify the effects of each drug a person has consumed, including alcohol. This can increase the level of impairment that the driver experiences.



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for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

800.232.4424 (phone)
www.ctclearinghouse.org

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

How Often Do Non-Alcohol Impaired Drivers Cause Crashes?

It's hard to measure how many crashes are caused by drugged driving. This is because:

- An accurate roadside test for drug levels in the body does not exist yet.
- Some drugs can stay in your system for days or weeks after use, making it difficult to determine when the drug was used, and therefore, how and if it impaired driving.
- Police don't usually test for drugs if drivers have reached an illegal blood alcohol level because there's already enough evidence for a Driving Under the Influence (DUI) charge.
- Many drivers who cause crashes are found to have both alcohol and other drugs in their system, making it hard to know which substance had the greater effect.

Is It Safe To Drive After Having One Drink?

As alcohol concentration increases, the negative effects on the central nervous system intensify. Even one drink can be too many for some people. Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) is the weight of alcohol in a certain volume of blood.

At a BAC of 0.08 grams of alcohol per deciliter (g/dL) of blood, the risk of a crash rises significantly. As a result, it is illegal in the United States to drive with a BAC of 0.08 or higher. However, even a small amount of alcohol can impair driving. In 2022, 2,337 people died in alcohol-related crashes where the driver's BAC was between 0.01 and 0.07.

In Connecticut, drivers aged 21 or older are legally intoxicated if they have a BAC of 0.08 or higher. Drivers that are under 21 years are considered legally intoxicated if they have a BAC of 0.02 or higher.

What Can Drivers Do To Prevent Impaired Driving?

- **Get A Ride Home:** if you have been drinking or using drugs, have someone who is not under the influence drive you home.
- **Decide On A Designated Driver Ahead of Time:** if you are in a group, agree on a trusted designated driver in the group who will not drink or use drugs.
- **Be Aware Of Prescription and Over-The-Counter Medications:** avoid driving if you are unsure how a medicine may affect you, if there are side effects that can harm your ability to drive, or if you are told by a doctor not to drive after using the medication.

What Can Everyone Do To Prevent Impaired Driving?

Do not get in the car with an impaired driver.

Do not let your friends drive while impaired by alcohol or other drugs.

If you are hosting a party where alcohol and drugs are being used, make sure all guests leave with a sober driver.

Always wear your seatbelt - it is your best defense against impaired drivers.

Talk to others about the importance of not consuming alcohol when driving.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

Drug Free CT

drugfreect.org

CT Department of Transportation

www.ct.gov/DOT

National Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

www.madd.org



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